





THE FUR TRAIL OMNIBUS

By BARRETT WILLOUGHBY

containing two complete novels

WHERE THE SUN
SWINGS NORTH

ROCKING MOON

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WHERE THE SUN SWINGS NORTH

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WHERE THE SUN SWINGS NORTH
PART I

WHERE THE SUN ALWAYS RISES

PART I

In this book I write of my own country and its people
as I know them—not artfully, perhaps, but truthfully.

BARRETT WILLOUGHBY.

Katalla, Alaska.

In this book I write of my own country and its people
as I know them - not as they are, but as they should be.

Barrett W. Wilson

Seattle, Alaska

CHAPTER I

THE WHITE CHIEF OF KATLEEAN

IT was quiet in the great store room of the Alaska Fur and Trading Company's post at Kat-lee-án. The westering sun streaming in through a side window lighted up shelves of brightly labeled canned goods and a long, scarred counter piled high with gay blankets and men's rough clothing. Back of the big, pot-bellied stove—cold now—that stood near the center of the room, lidless boxes of hard-tack and crackers yawned in open defiance of germs. An amber, mote-filled ray slanted toward the moss-chinked log wall where a row of dusty fox and wolverine skins hung—pelts discarded when the spring shipment of furs had been made, because of flaws visible only to expert eyes.

At the far end of the room the possessor of those expert eyes sat before a rough home-made desk. There was a rustle of papers and he closed the ledger in front of him with an air of relief. He clapped his hands smartly. Almost on the instant the curtain hanging in the doorway at the side of the desk was drawn aside and a small, brown feminine hand materialized.

"My cigarettes, Decitan."

The man's voice was low, with that particular vibrant

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quality often found in the voices of men accustomed to command inferior peoples on the far outposts of civilization.

The curtain wavered again and from behind the folds a brown arm, bare and softly rounded, accompanied the hand that set down a tray of smoking materials.

With a careless nod toward his invisible servitor, the man picked up a cigarette and lighted it. He took one long, deep pull. Tossing it aside he swung his chair about and faced the open doorway that gave on a courtyard and the bay beyond.

He readjusted the scarlet band about his narrow hips. Flannel-shirted, high-booted, he stretched his six-foot length in the tilting chair and clasped his hands behind his head. The movement loosened a lock of black hair which fell heavily across his forehead. His eyes, long, narrow and the color of pale smoke, drowsed beneath brows that met above his nose. Thin, sharply defined nostrils quivered under the slightest emotion, and startling against the whiteness of his face, was a short, pointed beard, black and silky as a woman's hair. When Paul Kilbuck, the white trader of Katleean, smiled, his thin, red lips parted over teeth white and perfect, but there was that in the long, pointed incisors that brought to mind the clean fangs of a wolf-dog.

He closed his pale eyes now and smiled to himself. His work on the Company's books was finished for the present. He hated the petty details of account keeping, but since the death of old Add-'em-up Sam, his helper and accountant, who had departed this world six

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months before during a spell of delirium tremens, the trader had been obliged to do his own.

Queer and clever things had Add-'em-up done to the books. Down in San Francisco the directors of the Alaska Fur and Trading Company had long suspected it no doubt, but it was not for nothing that Paul Kilbuck was known up and down the coast of Alaska as the White Chief. No other man in the North had such power and influence among the Thlinget tribes. No other man sent in such quantities of prime pelts; hence the White Chief of Katleean had never been obliged to give too strict an accounting of his stewardship. Taking what belongs to a company is not, in the elastic code of the North, considered stealing. "God is high above and the Czar is far away," said the plundering, roistering old Russians of Baranoff's day, and the spirit in the isolated posts had not changed, though Russian adventurers come no more to rape Alaska of her riches, and the Stars and Stripes now floats over the old-time Russian stronghold at Sitka.

For eighteen years Kilbuck had been the agent of the Company. In trading-posts up and down the coast where the trappers and prospectors gather to outfit, many tales of the White Chief were afloat: his trips to the Outside*; his lavish spending of money; his hiring of private cars to take him from Seattle to New York; his princely entertainment of beautiful women. In every story told of Paul Kilbuck there were women. Sometimes they were white, but more often they were dusky beauties of the North.

*Name by which the States is designated in the North.

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Among the several dark-eyed Thlinget women who occupied the mysterious quarters back of the log store, there was always rejoicing when the White Chief returned from his visits to the States. He was a generous master, bringing back with him many presents from the land of the white people—rings, beads, trinkets, and yards of bright colored silks. The favorites of his household fondled these gifts for a time with soft, guttural cries of delight and gentle strokings of their slim, brown hands, and then laid them away in fantastically carved Indian chests of yellow cedar.

Perhaps the strangest of these gifts had been a pair of homing pigeons, which had thrived and multiplied under the care of Add-'em-up Sam. A fluttering of wings now outside the doorway bespoke the presence of some of them, and Kilbuck stirred in his chair and opened his eyes.

He had been many hours alone in the store, but he had been prepared for that today. The entire post of Katleean was getting ready for the Potlatch, an Indian festival scheduled for the near future. For this occasion Kayak Bill, in his carefully secreted still across the lagoon, had completed a particularly potent batch of moonshine, known locally as hootch. The arrival, earlier in the afternoon, of the jocose old hootch-maker with a canoe-load of his fiery beverage, had been a signal for a gathering at his cabin across the courtyard. From the sounds that now floated out on the late afternoon air, he must already have distributed generous samples of his brew.

The White Chief rose from his chair and reached

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for another cigarette. As usual, he tossed it away after one long, deep inhalation. Before the smoke cleared from his head, he was crossing the store room with his easy panther tread—the result of former years of moccasin-wearing.

In the open doorway he paused, leaned against the portal and hooked one thumb beneath his scarlet belt. His narrow eyes swept the scene before him. Across the bay, between purple hills, a valley lay dreaming in rose-lavender mist. Blue above the August haze was a glimpse of a glacier, and farther back, peaks rose tier upon tier in the vague, amethystine distance.

Suddenly the quiet beauty was shot through with the sound of loud voices and snatches of song issuing from the cabin of Kayak Bill. The trader listened with a smile that was half a sneer. He himself never drank while at the post, deeming that it lessened his influence with the Indians. But among the secrets of his own experience were memories of wild days and nights aboard visiting schooners, at the end of which prone in the captain's bunk, he had lain for hours in alcoholic oblivion.

The voices from the cabin ceased abruptly. Then like the bellow of a fog horn on a lonely northern sea came Kayak Bill's deep bass:

“Take me north of old Point Barrow
Where there ain't no East or West;
Where man has a thirst that lingers
And where moonshine tastes the best;
Where the Arctic ice-pack hovers
'Twixt Alaska and the Pole,

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And there ain't no bloomin' fashions
To perplex a good man's soul."

There was a momentary pause followed by a hubbub of masculine voices apparently in a dispute as to how the song should run. High above the others rose a squeaky Scandinavian protest:

"By yingo, ven ay ban cook on *Soofie Suderlant* ve sing it so *dis* vay——"

"Close yore mouth, Silvertip." As a whale would swallow a minnow so Kayak Bill's drawling tones engulfed the thin, high accents of the one-time cook of the *Sophie Sutherland*. "I ain't no nature for Swedes a-devilin' o' me. I been singin' that song for nigh on to ten yars, and by the roarin' Jasus, I reckon I know how to sing it. Come on boys—now all together!"

Joining the again raised bass of Kayak Bill, several voices took up the rollicking strain, among them the high, easily recognizable tenor of Silvertip, and the voice of another, a baritone of startling mellowness and purity, having in it a timbre of youth and recklessness:

"Up into the Polar Seas,
Where the Innuited maidens be,
There's a fat, bright-eyed va-hee-ney
A-waitin' there for me.
She's sittin' in her igloo cold,
Chewing on a muckluck sole,
And the sun comes up at midnight
From an ice-pack round the Pole."

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At the sound of the baritone, the White Chief hitched his shoulders with a movement of satisfaction. Add-'em-up Sam's successor, the bookkeeper, was bidding fair to follow in the sodden footsteps of his predecessor. Given a little more time and this baritone-singing *cheechako** would be where the White Chief need have no anxiety as to the accounts rendered the Company's new president, whom Kilbuck had never seen. A little more time, a little more hootch, and he would also have settled the case of Na-lee-nah.

The thought of the Thlinget girl's soft brown eyes brought a momentary pang. The white plague permitted few native women to become old. Twice now Naleenah had lost her voice, and only last night he had noticed behind her soft, her singularly beautiful little ears, the peculiar drawn look that to his practiced eye spelled tuberculosis. She would last two years more, perhaps, but in the meantime he must protect himself—he stirred uneasily. The bookkeeper must be made to take her off his hands.

His musing was broken into by another burst of song:

“Oh-o-o-o! I am a jolly rover
And I lead a jolly life!
I have my hootch and salmon
And a little squaw to wife.”

Simultaneously the door of Kayak Bill's cabin opened and the owner, a tatterdemalion figure, stood for a moment on the doorstep. Stretching his arms above

*Newcomer.

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his head, he yawned prodigiously, and then, espying Kilbuck, sauntered across the courtyard toward him.

An old sombrero curved jauntily on red-grey hair that was overly long. A wavy beard of auburn-grey spread over the front of his blue flannel shirt. Hanging loosely from his shoulders a hair-seal waistcoat, brightly trimmed with red flannel, served as a coat above faded blue overalls, and from the knees down Kayak Bill was finished off with hip rubber boots, the turned-down tops of which flapped with every step, lending a swashbuckling air to his rolling gait.

He seated himself leisurely on the steps below the platform in front of the trading-post door.

"By hell, Chief," he drawled, drawing a huge clasp-knife from his pocket, "I been grazin' on this here Alasky range nigh on to twenty yars, and so help me Hannah, I never did find a place so wild or a bunch o' hombres so tough but what sooner or later all hands starts a-singin' o' the female sect." With a movement of his thumb Kayak Bill released the formidable blade of the knife, and nonchalantly, dexterously, began using it as a toothpick.

"Yas," he said slowly, in answer to the other's silence, "a-talkin' and a-singin' o' women and love. . . . Now, I hearn tell a heap about love and women in my time, but neither o' them things has affected my heart ever, though one time a spell back, tobaccy did. Still, Chief, with all respects to yore sentiments regardin' them Chocolate Drops what inhabits yore harem, . . . still, it sort o' roils me up to hear a white man a-talkin' and a-singin' o' takin' a squaw to wife."

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There was an involuntary contraction of the hand that was hooked under Paul Kilbuck's belt. Not another man from Dixon's Entrance to Point Barrow would have dared to hint at the White Chief's domestic arrangements in that gentleman's hearing, but there was something in the soft twinkle of Kayak Bill's hazel eye, something in the crude, whimsical philosophy distilled in the old hootch-maker's heart, that amused, while it piqued the trader at Katleean. He sat down now on the steps beside his visitor.

"Kayak," he said, almost gently, "when an old fellow like you begins to talk about squaws I have to smile. A man past sixty—! But how about twenty-five years ago? . . . What's a man going to do when he finds himself on the edge of the wilderness and—he wants a woman?" Kilbuck's voice rose slightly, his black brows drew together over the pale, unseeing eyes that sought the distant peaks, his thin nostrils quivered. "It's a wild country up here, Kayak. Makes a man hunger for something soft and feminine—and where's the pale-faced woman who would follow a man into this—" He finished his sentence with a wave of his hand. "That is a woman one would marry," he amended. "The average female of that country down south has no spirit of adventure in her make-up."

Kayak Bill closed his clasp-knife, restored it to his pocket and slowly drew forth an ancient corn-cob pipe.

"Wall, Chief," he drawled presently between puffs, "I ain't a-sayin' yore not right, seein' as you've had consid'able more experience with petticoats than me; but one time I hearn a couple o' scientific dudes a-talkin'

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about females and they was of the notion that sons gets their brains and their natures from their mam-mies." Disregarding the contemptuous sound uttered by the White Chief, Kayak's slow tones flowed on: "And I'm purty nigh persuaded them fellows is right. . . . Take it down in Texas now, where I was drug up. I'm noticin' a heap o' times how the meechinest, quietest little old ladies has the rarin'est, terrin'-est sons, hell-bent on fightin' and adventure. . . . Kinder seems to me, Chief, that our women has been bottled up so long by us men folks they just ain't had no chance to strike out that way, except by givin' o' their natures to their sons. You take any little gal, Chief, a-fore they get her taken with the notion that it ain't lady-like to fight, and by hell, she can lick tar outen any boy her size in the neighborhood. Same way with she-bears, or a huskie bitch. Durned if they don't beat all get-out when it comes to fightin' courage!"

Kayak Bill drew once or twice on his pipe with apparently unsatisfactory results, for he slowly removed his sombrero, drew a broom-straw from inside the band, extracted the stem of the corn-cob and ran the straw through it. The immediate vicinity became impregnated with a violent odor of nicotine. The White Chief, however, musing close by on the steps, seemed not to notice it. His eyes were fixed on three Indian canoes being paddled in from the lagoon across the bay which was now taking on the opalescent tints of the late Alaska sunset.

"What I been a-sayin' goes for the white women, Chief. As for them Chocolate Drops—wall, I ain't

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made up my mind exactly. 'Pears to me if I ever went a-courtin' though, it would be just like goin' a-huntin': no fun in it if the end was certain and easy-like. Barrin' the case of Silvertip and Senott, his squaw, it's like this: you say 'Come,' and they come. You say 'Go,' and they go. Now, a white woman ain't that way. By the roarin' Jasus, you never can tell which way she's goin' to jump!" Kayak Bill held the stem of his pipe up to the light and squinted through it, fitted it again into the bowl and gave an experimental draw. "But everybody to his own cemetery, says I."

"Bill, you old reprobate, you have an uncanny way of picking the weak spots in everything. There's some truth in that last. . . . Gad, I'd like to get into a game of love with a woman of my own blood up here in the wilderness! . . . There's never been a white woman in Katleean. It would be great sport to see one up against it here, eh, Kayak?" The White Chief turned, smiling, and the light in his pale, narrow eyes matched the wolfish gleam of his sharp teeth.

The face of the old hootch-maker was hidden in a smoke cloud, but his voice drawled on as calmly as ever: "Wall, from what I hearn tell when I'm over at the Chilcat Cannery, Chief, you may get a chance to see a white woman at Katleean purty soon. There's a prospector named Boreland a-cruisin' up the coast in his own schooner, the *Hoonah*, and from what I can make out he's got his wife and little boy with him."

The trader turned sharply. Like a hungry wolf scenting quarry he raised his head. There was a keener look in his eye. His thin nostrils twitched.

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“A *white* woman, Kayak? Are you sure?”

Before Kayak Bill could answer there came an extra loud burst of song from the cabin across the courtyard. The door had been flung wide and in the opening swayed the arresting figure of the leader of the wild chorus.

CHAPTER II

THE CHEECHAKO

HE was young and tall and slight, with a touch of recklessness in his bearing that was somehow at variance with the clean-cut lines of his face. He stood unsteadily on the threshold, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his grey tweed trousers, chin up-tilted from a strong, bare throat that rose out of his open shirt. As the singing inside the cabin ceased, he shook back the tumbled mass of his brown hair and alone his mellow baritone continued the whaler's song:

“Up into the Polar Seas,
Where the greasy whalers be,
There's a strip of open water
Reaching north to eighty-three——”

The White Chief, with his eyes on the singer, spoke to Kayak Bill.

“Our gentleman-bookkeeper takes to your liquid dynamite like an Eskimo to seal oil, Kayak. He's been at Katleean three months now, and I'll be damned if he's been sober three times since he landed. Seems to be hitting it up extra strong now that the Potlatch

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is due—" Kilbuck lowered his voice—"I want nothing said to him of the prospector and his white wife, *understand?*"

At the dictatorial tone flung into the last sentence there came a narrowing of the old hootch-maker's eyes. It was seldom that Paul Kilbuck spoke thus to Kayak Bill.

The singer was crossing the courtyard now with steps of exaggerated carefulness. Suddenly he paused. His dark eyes, in vague, alcoholic meditation, sought the distant peaks stained with the blush-rose of sunset. The evening-purple of the hills fringed the bay with mystery. Gulls floated high on lavender wings, their intermittent plaint answering the Indian voices that drifted up from the beach where the canoes were landing.

Kayak Bill moved over on the step, indicating the space beside him.

"Come along side o' me, son, and get yore bearin's!" he called.

"Yes, Harlan, stop your mooning and come here. I want to talk to you."

Gregg Harlan turned, and the smile that parted his lips, though born in a liquor-fogged brain, was singularly winning.

"Chief," his words came distinctly but with careful deliberation, "an outsider would think—that I am—a—fellow of rare—judgment and s-sound phil-os-ophy from the way—you're always—wanting to talk—to—me."

He advanced and seated himself on the steps near

the base of the flag-pole, leaning heavily against it. The gay recklessness that is the immediate effect of the fiery native brew of the North was evidently wearing away, and preceding the oblivion that was fast coming upon him, stray glimpses of his past, bits of things he had read or heard, and snatches of poetry flashed on the screen of his mind.

"It doesn't go with me—Chief. Don't—bring on—your—little forest—maiden—Naleenah—again. Tired—hearing about—her. Know—what you say: Up here—my people—never know. *Me*—a squaw man! Lord! What do I want—with—a squaw?" He laughed as at some blurred vision of his brain. "It's not that—I'm so damned virtuous, Chief. But I'm—fas-fas-tid-ious. That's it—fastidious——"

Paul Kilbuck's eyes flashed a cold steel grey. "We'll see how fastidious you'll be a year from now." His lip lifted on one side exposing a long, pointed tooth. "That'll be enough, now, Harlan."

"Sure, 's enough—for me, Chief," admitted the young man with drowsy good nature, as his tousled head sought a more comfortable place against the flag-pole. "Pardon—casting aspersions—on your—taste in women, Chief. Wouldn't do—it—if sober. Hate to be sober. Makes me feel—re-responsible for so—many things. . . . Hence flowing bowl. 'Member old Omar—unborn Tomorrow and dead—Yesterday. . . . Why fret 'bout it—if—if—today—be—sweet." His voice trailed off in a murmur and his boyish chin with its look of firmness despite his dejection, sank slowly on his breast.

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The canoes had made a landing. A dozen or more Thlinget women came straggling up the beach laden with the fruits of their afternoon labors: gay-colored baskets of wild strawberries, red and fragrant from the sand-dunes along the lagoon. From the Indian Village, a short distance down the curve of the beach where the smokes of evening fires were rising, a welcoming buck or two came to accompany the softly laughing squaws.

Slightly in advance of the shawled figures moving toward the group on the steps walked one whose slenderness and grace marked her from the rest. A scarlet shawl splashed the cream of her garments. Unlike the other women, she wore no disfiguring handkerchief on her head. Her face, oval and creamy-brown, was framed by two thick braids that fell over her shoulders. In the crook of her arm rested a basket of berries. At her side, rubbing against her now and then, came a powerful huskie, beautiful with the lean grace of the wolf and paw-playing as a kitten.

"Mush on,* Kobuk! Mush—you!" She laughed, pushing him aside as she advanced.

When she smiled up at the white men her face was lighted by long-lashed childish eyes, warm and brown as a sun-shot pool in the forest.

The White Chief rose. With an imperious gesture he motioned the other Indians back.

"*Ah cgoo*, Naleenah! Come here!" In rapid, gut-

*Corruption of the French *marchez, marche*, which the Canadian *coureurs du bois* used to shout to their dogs, meaning to go forward, advance.

tural Thlinget he spoke to the girl, pointing from time to time to the now unconscious Harlan.

As she listened the smile faded from her face. Her smooth brow puckered. . . . She turned troubled eyes to Kayak Bill, sitting silent, imperturbable, in a cloud of tobacco smoke, his interest apparently fixed where the slight breeze was ruffling the evening radiance of the water.

Still mutely questioning, Naleenah glanced at the figure of the young white man, slumped in stupor against the flag-pole. . . . A look of unutterable scorn distorted her face. Then she looked up at the White Chief shaking her head in quick negation.

At her rebellion Kilbuck's voice shot out stingingly like the lash of a whip. With a hurt, stunned expression the girl shrank back. Her shawl shivered into a vivid heap about her feet. The basket of berries slipped unheeded to the sand, their wild fragrance scenting the air about her.

While he was still speaking she started forward, her wide, idolatrous eyes raised to his, her little berry-stained hands held out beseechingly.

"No—no, Paul!" Anguish and pleading were in her broken English. "No, no! I can not do! Too mooch, too mooch I loof you, Paul!" Brimming tears overflowed and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Kayak Bill rose hastily and stalked across the platform into the store. The White Chief turned away with tightening lips, but there was no softening in his smoke-colored eyes. It would be to his interest to have his bookkeeper a squaw-man. The old Hudson

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Bay Company factors had proved the advantage of having their employees take Indian women. For his own health's sake he must get rid of Naleenah. The tubercular girl would live longer in the house of a white man than with her own people, where he would soon be forced to send her. He was, therefore, doing her a kindness in turning her over to Harlan.

"He lighted a cigarette, inhaled a deep draught, and tossing the scarcely burned weed away, crossed deliberately to the huddled figure of Gregg Harlan. He shook him by the shoulder.

"Wake up!" he ordered, "and go to your bunk."

From Kayak Bill's cabin doorway several men drifted curiously toward the store steps. The natives gathered closer.

The bookkeeper raised his head and passed a slow hand over bewildered eyes.

"Beg—pardon, Chief," he said quickly, as he rose on unsteady legs, "making sleeping porch—of your—steps. . . . Awf-ly tired. . ." Wavering, he clung for support to the flag-pole.

With a peremptory gesture Kilbuck motioned to Naleenah.

"Take this man to his cabin," he snapped, "and—" he paused significantly, "remember what I have told you."

The girl came forward with drooping head and listless arms. She paused dully beside the flag-pole. The trader placed the arm of the stupefied young man across her slim shoulders. Obediently she led her charge away in the direction of the small cabins across the courtyard.

Though the eyes of the spectators had been intent on the drama of the steps, only Kayak Bill, perhaps, knew its real significance. The old man now stood in the doorway of the store, his sombrero pushed to the back of his head, a pair of binoculars held against his eyes.

From around the point beyond the Indian Village and into the bay, a white-sailed schooner had drifted. As it advanced there was wafted across the water a faint and silvery fragment of melody which endured but a moment and was gone.

The White Chief turned his back on the courtyard and for the first time noted Kayak Bill's attitude. He followed the direction of the old man's gaze and beheld the incoming vessel just as the white men and Indians behind him broke out in a babble of interest and curiosity.

There floated inshore the rattle of the windlass letting go the anchor chain. On the deck of the schooner men ran about as the sails were lowered. The vessel swung gently until the bow headed into the current of the incoming tide.

"Get out the canoe, Silvertip," ordered the trader, turning to his henchman, "and take Swimming Wolf with you. Find out who's——"

He broke off, wondering, incredulous, for at that moment across the water came the golden singing of a violin. Wonderfully low and tender it began. Swelling, it rose and soared and trembled, then with lingering, chorded sweetness died away like the exquisite music of a dream.

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The listeners on the shore stood spellbound.

Gregg Harlan, swaying in the doorway of his cabin, steadied himself while the silvery harmony stole into his clouded senses.

"Strange—strange," he muttered, "a violin—playing like that—in Katleean. Dreams—more—dreams—" He stumbled into the room and the weeping Indian girl guided his footsteps to the narrow bunk in the corner.

In the after-sunset light that precedes the long Alaskan twilight there is some rare quality that seems to bring nearer objects on the water. Kayak Bill in the doorway, took another long look through the glasses, then stepped down to the White Chief's side. His voice was the first to break the enchanted silence that followed the strains of the violin.

"That wind-jammer's the *Hoonah* I been a-tellin' you of, Chief," he drawled, holding out the binoculars. "There's two women aboard o' her, instead o' one. Pears to me like one o' them's purty young, and it's her that's standin' in the stern a-playin' o' the fiddle."

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE SQUAW WITH WHITE FEET

THE morning after the arrival of the schooner, Gregg Harlan woke with an aching head and trembling limbs. As he sat on the edge of his bunk holding his fingers against his throbbing temples, he made a mental vow that he would drink no more of Kayak Bill's liquor; that *today* he would settle down to the business that had brought him to Katleean. He had made the same vow every morning since his landing—made it earnestly, intending to keep it, but there was something in the air of the trading-post that made irresistible the reckless camaraderie engendered by the hootch-cup; something that emphasized that very quality of gay irresponsibility he had come North to lose.

The stale, close air of his little cabin sent waves of nausea through him. Hatless and coatless he sought the open air. He turned his steps instinctively toward the point beyond the Indian Village. On the other side, screened from sight of the post, he was accustomed to take the daily plunge in the bay that enabled him to throw off the immediate effects of his hard drinking.

As he stumbled along, his lack-lustre eyes rested but a moment on the schooner in the bay. He had not

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been long enough away from the world to be other than faintly interested in the arrival, and his recollections of the night before were nil.

The tide was low. The fresh, keen scent of seaweed came up from the Point refreshing his sickened senses. Noisy gulls wheeled and tilted over the brown, kelp-covered rocks and on the ridge back of the Indian graveyard, ravens answered the gull cries with raucous soliloquies.

He was nearing the Point when his eye was attracted by a splash of white among the boulders. Something peculiar in its outline drew his inquiring steps. At the sound of crunching gravel under his feet a great huskie dog rose almost from under him. The young man sprang aside with a startled exclamation. Against the wet sand the dog's dark coat had been practically invisible.

"Heavens, Kobuk, old boy! I thought I was seeing things!"

He passed a damp hand over his brow. The dog, strangely undemonstrative, advanced and placed a sleek head against Gregg's knee, its pointed muzzle down, its tail hanging dispiritedly. Vaguely wondering what the trader's favorite lead-dog was doing among the boulders on the Point, Harlan patted the animal's broad back and turned to the object that had attracted his attention.

What he had at first taken to be seaweed was a mass of long dark hair. Beneath it a damp, clinging cream-colored garment outlined the dead body of an Indian girl.

"God!" came Gregg's awed whisper, as he bent

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above the pitiful little heap. "The White Chief's Naleenah! . . . Poor little devil!"

Steadied by the tragedy he did not understand, he stooped and gathered up the still form. He started back to the trader's quarters, little dreaming that the last earthly act performed by those small hands now so still, had been for himself. But if Kobuk, following close at his heels, could have spoken, he would have told of the manner of her going, the night before.

The trading-post of Katleean had lain wrapped in moonlight and slumber when Naleenah, after obeying her master's instructions to the extent of making the drunken young white man comfortable, crept from the doorway of Harlan's cabin. Kobuk, waiting outside for the mistress who had fed him since puppy days, pressed closely to her side as she crossed the courtyard.

At the beachline, where silvered rice-grass grew tall among the piles of whitened driftwood, she paused, looking with wistful eyes toward the Indian Village cuddled in the crescent curve of the beach. The weird, ghostly totems of her people rose above the roofs, catching the moonbeams fearfully on their mystic carvings. Stern and forbidding they seemed, as if guarding the quiet shelters at their feet against one who had forsaken them for the more luxurious cabins of the white man. . . . Slowly she turned from the tribal emblems of her clan to look back at the log trading-post, dim and softly grey and splashed with shadows. . . . So still she stood and so long, that the dog grew restless and rubbed his cold nose against her hand.

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She sighed, a tired, quivering sigh like that of a child who has been hurt, and with bowed head, stumbled along the trail that led down to the water.

Over a dark line of hills glowed the glorious red-gold orb of *Sha-hee-yi*, The-Moon-When-All-Things-Make-Their-Winter-Homes. Unbelievably large and round and clear it stood out against the night-blue, throwing a path of shimmering gold across the bay to her little feet. With eyes raised to its splendor, she waded out slowly, steadily, into the moonlit, whispering waves. . . .

At the edge of the beach Kobuk settled on his haunches, watching her with questioning, side-turned head. He whined uneasily.

The scarlet shawl slipped from her shoulders and floated off behind her. . . . The water crept above her waist . . . her shoulders. Her wide-eyed, frightened face caught the light. . . . Then the ripples closed above her head. A moment later her long hair, loosed from its braids, swayed on the amber-lighted surface like seaweed, then the moonpath lay quiet as before.

On the shore Kobuk waited, his slant eyes blinking at the moon. Occasionally he raised his pointed nose and uttered a muffled whine that ended in a short, querulous yelp. . . . Hours passed. . . . The tide began to ebb, leaving a dark line of sand at the edge of the water. . . . After a long while Kobuk went in search of his mistress, and having found her, watched beside her until Harlan came and bore her away.

As the young man ascended the steps to the store platform he was dimly aware of encountering a tall,

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dark stranger, who afterward proved to be the owner of the schooner that had come in the evening before. Shane Boreland, whose figure was blocking the doorway, stepped aside to let Gregg pass into the building with his burden.

From about the stove, where several men were already gathered, came low exclamations, and the White Chief, who had been following Boreland to the door, stopped suddenly at the sight of Harlan. His face went as cold and emotionless as that of the dead girl.

"Take her in to Decitan," he said shortly, with a gesture toward his quarters back of the store. Turning on his heel, he walked out to the platform where Boreland stood waiting.

"A damned sad ending to their little domestic difficulty," he murmured softly, as befitted one with a large heart and a kindly understanding of the follies of youth. "But young Harlan, my bookkeeper, hasn't been long enough in the North to appreciate the intensity of these little hot-blooded savages. I told him, when he took Naleenah, . . ." The Chief, as if he had said too much, let his sentence trail off into silence. He shook his head in apparent sorrow, but his eyes were fixed on the schooner that rode at anchor in the bay.

"But don't let this incident mar your arrival, Boreland," Paul Kilbuck went on, and then, with the frontier heartiness he knew so well how to assume, he set about tendering Boreland the hospitality of the post, urging the prospector to bring his family ashore for a visit during the time of the coming Potlatch.

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This was a festival, he assured the master of the *Hoonah*, which could not fail to interest Mrs. Boreland and her younger sister.

Even as the trader planned for the reception of the white women, the squaws who had borne him children were preparing the body of little Naleenah for its resting place below the ridge where the grave-houses and totems of the Thlinget dead huddled among the wild celery bushes.

Quietly that night, just before moon-set she was laid away so that her funeral might cast no sadness on the coming visitors. On the grave, the silent women of the household placed the treasures that had been dear to the heart of the White Chief's favorite: a string of cheap beads, a scarlet shawl, gaudy painted cup and two dead pigeons, progenitors of the flock that now cooed and fluttered in and out of the high wire enclosure back of the store.

A week later on the ridge above the new-made grave of Naleenah, a white girl stood talking to a small boy by her side. Above the amber-freckled nose of the youngster wide grey eyes were raised in eager coaxing to her face. From the crown of his bare head, a lock of dark red hair trembling with absurd earnestness stood up from the mass of its fellows.

"Oh, Je-an! *Don't* put on your shoes and stockings just yet! Let's have one more story before we go back to the post. P-l-e-a-s-e, Auntie Jean!"

Jean Wiley dropped to the ground a bundle made of her discarded footwear. Earlier in the afternoon her nephew's barefoot enjoyment of the beach sand

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had enticed her to remove her own shoes and stockings, and delighting in the feel of the cool earth against her pink soles, she had not replaced them when they decided to follow the trail to the ridge. She tossed her head, and even in the sunless afternoon, the dark mass of hair that tumbled down her back seemed shot through with glints of copper.

"I wouldn't mind going without them always, Loll," she said, holding out a slim foot and contemplating the freedom of her five, wriggling, perfect toes. "But—" the foot took its place beside its stationary twin, "you see, little man, it isn't done at my age, even in Katleean." Her long-lashed hazel eyes, full of the dreams of eighteen happy years, laughed down at the boy, and her slender fingers, that could coax such tender harmonies from the strings of a violin, busied themselves with the ribbon that bound the hair at the back of her neck.

It was one of the lavender dream-days peculiar to the late summer of the North. Faint wisps of colorful mist clung to the pickets of the small fences in the Indian burial-place below them. The totems and the windows of the tiny grave-houses were filmed with it, and through the dim glass appeared vague glimpses of the kettles, blankets and provision inside the houses of the dead—material comforts which the Thlinget Indians provide for the departed soul's journey over the Spirit Trail to the Ghost's Home. On the quiet bay below, the *Hoonah*, blurred in mist, tugged gently at her anchor. Some hundred yards to the left smoke from the trading-post rose above the alder trees.

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"This is a dandy place for story-telling, Jean. See!" Little Laurence Boreland pointed to the dim-limned schooner. "The *Hoonah* looks like a ghost-ship out there. Listen! I'll tell you the story Kayak Bill scared me most to death with last night. Ugh! It's spooky, Jean!" The boy's eyes were round and his voice had lowered at the remembered thrills of terror. He tugged at the girl's short skirt, until she sat down beside him, tucking her slim bare feet beneath her as she prepared to listen.

A raven, weird epitome of Thlinget myth and legend, croaked spasmodically from the white branch of a dead spruce behind them. The damp air had in it the freshness of new-cut hemlock boughs, a wild, vigorous fragrance that stirs the imagination with strange, illusive promises of the wilderness.

"And the door of the dead-house slowly opened," Loll ended his tale, pointing to the graveyard below for local color, "and the door s-l-o-w-l-y opened and a long, white finger—a *bony* finger, beckoned——"

He broke off with a gasp of astonishment and terror, for above the rank growth of Indian celery in front of the lonely grave-house door, there was a sudden, unmistakable flutter of white. So thoroughly had the little fellow lost himself in the weird mysteries of his own creating that panic took possession of him, and communicated itself to the girl beside him. They sprang to their feet, and with one accord raced toward the trading-post.

Near the courtyard their footsteps slackened, and Jean began to recover herself, reminded of her shoes

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and stockings left behind on the knoll. She became suddenly ashamed of her headlong flight, precipitated, as she now saw, by the first breath of afternoon breeze as it came in from the sea and fluttered a piece of weather-bleached canvas nailed over the grave-house door.

"Goodness, Loll, you frightened me nearly to death with your wild imaginings!" She laughed. "Let's run back now and get our shoes and stockings."

The youngster laid a detaining hand on her arm. "But, Jean," his shrill voice trembled, "didn't you see it—the long, white skeleton finger?"

"Nonsense!" She stood a moment pointing out the reason for the flutter of white, and as she did so a group of Indians landing from canoes on the beach, came up the trail toward the post. Curiously and quickly they gathered about the strangers. Many of them had never before seen a white girl or boy, specimens of the strange Letquoan, the Snow People from that far-away land of the White Chief. Solemn, black-eyed little toddlers peered cautiously out from under their mother's shawls. Pretty young squaws with dark handkerchiefs over their heavy hair, jostled one another to get a better view, and at the sight of the white girl, the young buck gallants of the tribe straightened their shoulders and shifted their rifles to a jauntier angle.

In low, throaty tones, punctuated with long-drawn "Ah-a-a's" and occasional explosions of laughter, they talked among themselves, pressing closer each moment. From time to time a brown finger pointing at Jean's bare feet evoked a general shaking of dark heads and more "Ah-a-a's" of wonderment.

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Perhaps because of the apprehension in her heart, Jean held her head high and looked fearlessly into the brown, apparently menacing faces about her. She glanced out over the dark heads hoping to see some member of her own race; but the post, for the moment, seemed deserted by the whites. She reached for her nephew's small hand and held it tightly.

Among the Indians the talking ceased suddenly. A sense of expectation emanated from the group. There was a shifting of positions as a tall Thlinget, whom Jean had heard the White Chief call Swimming Wolf, stepped toward her, his red-bordered snowy blanket trailing majestically from his shoulders. He stopped, bent his stately form, and looked long and earnestly at her bare feet. Before the girl knew what he was about he had wetted his finger in his mouth, rubbed it along her foot, and scrutinized it gravely. He glanced up, his teeth flashing at her in a pleased smile.

"Ugh! Ugh!" he marveled in his best English. "Little squaw with white feet!"

The smile ended in an involuntary grunt, for Loll with the fire of wrath in his eye had leaped at the investigator and with all the strength of his eight years had planted both fists in the stomach of the unprepared Indian.

"*She's* not a squaw!" shouted the outraged little fellow, making ready for another attack.

At the same moment Jean, her face burning and her hazel eyes two points of fire, landed a stinging blow on the surprised Swimming Wolf's ear.

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Straightening himself, he side-stepped, flinging his white blanket over his shoulder with a sheepish grin.

"Fierce little squaw with white feet!" he chuckled, admiringly.

With loud laughs of amusement the others backed away. The circle broken, the indignant Jean caught at the hand of her small protector and fled away in the direction of the store.

Angry with herself and thoroughly mortified by what she considered the insulting familiarity of the Indian, she ran heedlessly. She rounded the corner of one of the little courtyard cabins with reckless haste and before she could check herself, had collided smartly with the dejected figure of a young man. The impact sent her staggering backward, but at the stammered words of apology which accompanied the steadying hands he reached toward her, she looked at him with angry scorn.

"It's a pity you white men are never around when you're needed!" she stormed at his surprised face. "But squaw-men, I suppose, are always busy—driving their wives to suicide!" She flung the last words at him and fled across the courtyard. At the moment she was out of patience with the entire population of Katleean. As she disappeared into the store with Loll, she left Gregg Harlan gazing after her perplexedly, wondering at her last sentence. It was his first actual meeting with either of the white women from the *Hoonah*. Because of their advent in Katleean he had remained sober for several days, but for some reason he did not understand he had not yet been given an

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opportunity to meet these women from his own world. He turned from his contemplation of the empty doorway and walked back to his own cabin, his head bowed in thought.

CHAPTER IV

BAIT

WHILE Jean and Loll were pursuing their adventures about the post the White Chief was entertaining his other two guests in his low-ceilinged living-room, dusky and pleasantly scented from logs of yellow cedar burning in the fireplace. He was posed in his favorite attitude, half-sitting, half-reclining among the cushions on a low couch of red fox skins. But while he told tales of the country to the interested Boreland, his narrow eyes watched the play of the firelight on the softly-massed golden-brown hair of Ellen, Boreland's wife, who sat knitting in the glow.

Life, for the trader, had taken on a new zest this past week. Long years of acting a part—the part of a great white chief, mysterious, all knowing, all powerful in the eyes of the simple natives of the North, had made him fully alive to the dramatic possibilities of playing host at Katleean, and he was not unaware of his own semi-barbaric attractiveness in these surroundings.

It had been easy to induce Shane Boreland, for the sake of his wife and young sister-in-law, to spend a few weeks in the quarters back of the store, where they were ministered to by the silent, dark-eyed women whose status they did not understand.

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The trader's heart was stirred with interest and expectancy. Here at last was an auditor worthy of his best efforts—a white woman, not too young, fair-faced and gentle, yet with the courage to follow her man into the wilds of a new country. A woman, who, he had learned, could unfailingly put a shot in a bull's eye at twenty paces and handle an oar in a small boat, yet a woman who could look sweetly domestic as she knitted on a garment for her small son. To Paul Kilbuck, as to all domineering men who scoff at matrimony, there was something irresistibly appealing in the "sweetly domestic" woman, something suggestive of that oldest occupation of woman—the business of ministering to man's physical and temperamental needs, the duty of making his body and his egotism comfortable. He watched her in covert approval.

How soft and white her throat appeared above the open neck of her blouse—soft and white with a tiny hollow at the base where a man might leave kisses—or the print of his teeth. What little hands she had, white with nails of rosy pink. Little white hands! The words kept singing through his consciousness. So long had brown hands done his bidding up here in the North that he had nearly forgotten that a woman's skin could be so white! To have those little white hands just once, softly feeling, caressing, losing themselves in the blackness of his beard——

The White Chief sat bolt upright to shake off the mad-sweet pang that had thrilled him. The voice of Boreland brought him back from the land of forbidden thought.

"You say this Lost Island is nothing but a myth, Kilbuck?" The prospector had evidently been thinking of the White Chief's last story as he sat rubbing the head of Kobuk, the huskie, who had placed his muzzle on Boreland's knee.

The trader lighted and tossed away a cigarette before he answered.

"Just how much truth there is in the tale of the Lost Island I can't say, Boreland," he said slowly, with a care to his English. He shifted his position until his eyes could no longer rest on the white woman in the fireglow. "It has come down from the days of the Russian occupation of the Aleutian Islands far to the west'ard. Our Thlingets, you know, got it from the natives of that section and the story runs that an Aleut and his wife were banished from their village for some crime, set adrift in a bidarka, a skin boat. Instead of perishing, as their kinsmen intended, the pair turned up a year later with a tale of a marvelous island many days' paddling to the eastward. On this island, they said, the sun shone warmer and the flowers grew larger and the snowfall was lighter than anywhere else in their world; and there was some queer story, I don't remember the details exactly, about an underground passage and sands flecked with shining metal, the stuff that trimmed up the holy pictures the Russian priests brought over from Russia."

"Gold!" interrupted Boreland. "It must have been gold!" His brown eyes glowed and the White Chief noted that an eager alertness lighted his lean tanned face.

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"The exiles decided to let a few of their friends in on the island proposition and set out at the head of several bidarkas. According to the story they knocked about up and down the North Pacific from Kodiak to Sitka for several months—but they never found their island. Neither did the natives of later years who went in search of it from time to time."

"But the Russians, Kilbuck, didn't they ever try to find the place?"

The trader, pleased at the interest his story had aroused, lay back once more against his cushions. "Possibly they did," he went on easily. "But it's likely they were satisfied with the wealth of furs their Aleut hunters brought them. Those were great old days for traffic in furs. The early Russians were, for the most part a lazy, rum-drinking lot, you know. To them riches meant sea-otter skins, and they managed by various devilish methods—I can't say more about them in your presence, Mrs. Boreland—to enslave the entire Aleut nation to do their hunting. They gave them a little—and a mighty little—trade goods in return." By the inflections of his voice the agent of the Alaska Fur and Trading Company sought to convey to his listeners the impression that the policy of those early companies was against *his* principles, though the books, so carefully kept by Add-'em-up Sam might have told a different story.

"And it's possible the Russians thought the yarn to be merely another native fairy tale," continued Kilbuck, waving a careless hand. "As I said there may be no other foundation for it. It has come down now

for over two hundred years, and you may be sure when an Indian tells a story it loses nothing in the telling."

The drowsy crackle of the flaming logs filled a short interval.

Shane Boreland sat lost in meditation, his hand resting quietly on the dog's head, his eyes adream as with visions of the golden sands of the Lost Island.

His wife glanced up at him, uneasily, almost apprehensively it seemed to Kilbuck who was again watching her. Never in all his varied amorous experiences had a woman's eyes held such a look for the White Chief—a look in which there was a protecting tenderness, comradeship and something more.

He settled farther back in his cushions, his eyes narrowing. Love had yet some new delight to offer him. . . . His virile years were slipping by—he was surprised and disturbed how often this thought had been with him of late. Should he grasp the opportunity offered? There might be a way—up here in Katleean where his word was law. . . . Perhaps——

Kilbuck brought himself up with a start. Ellen Boreland had dropped her knitting and had crossed to her husband's chair. Her hand rested on his broad shoulder and there was a wistful little twist to her smile as she shook him gently to rouse him.

"He's forever dreaming of the gold that lies beyond the skyline—this man of mine—and always going to find it," she said fondly. "So please, Mr. Kilbuck, don't get him interested in any mythical island. We've been gone from the States six months now, and I want him to go back for the winter." There was a half-playful,

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half-earnest note of pleading in her voice, but the White Chief noticed that her eyes did not fully meet his.

During all her thirty years, doubtless, Ellen Boreland had looked a friendly world in the eye. She was that sort. He saw that she was troubled now at not being able to do this in the case of the trader of Katleean. Probably he himself was not attractive to her—perhaps he was even fascinatingly repellant with that electric and disturbing and promising quality that drew almost irresistibly. There were women who, under that impulsion, had been moved to come close and gaze into his pale, black-lashed eyes. It was an impulse akin to that which urges people to fling themselves from great heights; to peer into abandoned, stagnant wells. . . . He had an idea that she knew he saw this, for he had watched her face flush under his glance as though at the thought of having dishonored herself by sharing with him some guilty secret. He saw that she was uncomfortable in accepting his hospitality. Twice during their stay she had entreated her husband to leave Katleean, or at least go back aboard the schooner for the remainder of their visit. But Shane Boreland, clean-hearted adventurer, to whom the vagaries of a woman's mind were a closed book, had only laughed at her request, retorting that life aboard the *Hoonah* had made her into a little sea-dog and a few weeks ashore with such a host as the White Chief would do her a world of good.

The host now lighted one of his short-lived cigarettes. In his mind was forming a plan suggested by Ellen Boreland's words. He might develop it later, and again

he might not, but it would not be amiss to prepare the way.

He tossed his cigarette into the fireplace, slipping without effort into the part he had assigned himself.

"Dreams are the things that make life worth living, Mrs. Boreland." His low, vibrant tones sounded pleasantly in the dusky room. "Boreland here has his dreams of a mine of gold, but I—" he hesitated, his voice taking on a whimsical softness, "but I, in my Northern solitude, have my dreams of a heart of gold." His look was designed to leave no doubt in Ellen Boreland's mind that it was a feminine heart of gold that he sought.

There was a pause during which the charred logs in the fireplace dropped down sending up a brighter flame.

"But you mustn't be too sure that the Lost Island is a myth." He spoke briskly now as if putting aside deliberately his own longings. "In this part of the country some say that the Lost Island is that of Kon Klayu."

As Boreland looked up questioningly the White Chief went on:

"Of course, it does in some ways answer the description. It is ninety miles off the coast here. Cape Kat-leeen is the nearest land. The Japan current gives it a milder climate and we know that the beach sand carries gold—a little gold."

"Anyone living there?" interrupted Boreland eagerly.

"Not a soul. The Alaska Fur and Trading Company did send a party out there some years ago, to start a fox-farm. That's how I got my information. They

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were a hootch-drinking, lazy lot and the farm wasn't a success. But Add-'em-up Sam, a bookkeeper I used to have, spent a winter there. He told me many things about the place." The White Chief paused a moment. A new idea had just come to him. "Silvertip, who used to be on the whaler *Sophie Sutherland*, has stopped there for water, too."

Boreland, rising from his chair thrust both hands into his pockets and began to pace up and down the room.

"By thunder, Kilbuck, I'm interested in that island, whether it's the Lost Island or not! Kon Klayu . . . Kon Klayu . . ." He repeated the name thoughtfully. "Seems to me that's the Thlinget for ruby sand, which in itself suggests possibilities. Ruby sand is a gold carrier!" There was a note of enthusiasm in Boreland's voice, but as he noticed the look on his wife's face he crossed to her side and put an arm over her slender shoulders. "But we'll talk that over some other time, Chief. I don't want to bore Ellen with too much mining——"

A flinging open of the door that led to the store cut short his speech as an indignant little boy burst in on them.

"Mother! Mother!" he shouted. "That big old Indian, Swimming Wolf, called my Auntie Jean a squaw!"

"And the wretch put his hand on my foot, Ellen!" Jean following close on the heels of her nephew, stopped before her sister, her slim hands clenched at her sides, each outraged shake of her head loosening the ribbon that bound her hair. "I hate this place, Shane!" she

cried, turning swiftly to her brother-in-law. "I wish we were all back aboard the *Hoonah*!" Her voice trembled with unshed tears of mortification, and both her sister and Shane started toward her with exclamations of sympathy and alarm.

The White Chief regarded the attractively disheveled little figure with appreciation, but he realized that something had happened which endangered the stay of his visitors. He rose to place a chair for her. When he spoke his voice, the voice that had charmed many women, soothed while it promised.

"There now, Miss Wiley, things may not be so bad as you think. Sit down and tell me all about it and I'll see what can be done."

Disregarding the proffered chair, the girl launched forth with the story of her encounter with Swimming Wolf. Her slim hands gestured. Above her flushed cheeks her eyes flashed and the unruly cloud of hair, freed at last from its ribbon, fell about her shoulders.

As she told of the slap on Swimming Wolf's ear, the pale eyes of the White Chief glowed. Truly, as Kayak Bill had said, one could never tell about a white woman. Here was a situation he would have to handle with care. Here was a time when his knowledge of Indian nature, gained during years of association with them, stood him in good stead.

"Miss Jean," he said. "Just a moment. I think I can explain Swimming Wolf's extraordinary action." The White Chief measured her with an air of understanding that, he could see, made an impression on the girl in spite of herself. "An Indian, you know, never

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really grows up. Even though he has the body of a man, he still keeps the heart of a child. Now when *you* were little, Miss Jean, don't you remember the time you saw your first negro—a black, strange creature? Didn't you wonder, while you looked at his face and his hands if he could possibly be black all over? Be honest now, didn't you?"

Loll who had settled himself on the floor with an arm about Kobuk's neck, sprang up and stood beside his aunt.

"Yes, *I* did, Chief," he interrupted, with eager, nodding head, "and I asked him about it, too. I did!"

Jean's face was clearing. She inclined her head in faint affirmation.

"Just so," the trader went on. "When Swimming Wolf saw his first white woman no doubt in his simple heart he wondered, too, and so did the other natives who gathered about you,—children, all of them. Swimming Wolf, the clumsy siwash, had no English words to ask you about it, so he took the simplest way to find out whether or not the white came off!"

A shadowy smile began to twitch at the corners of Jean's mouth. Seeing it, the White Chief was encouraged to go on:

"The inquisitive rascal is really one of our bravest hunters, and a man of tall totems and many blankets. He would feel astonished and *kush-i-a-tu*—very sad—if he knew he had offended you. As a matter of fact,"—the trader laughed—"the Wolf admires you and in his primitive way has paid you a great compliment. I

wasn't going to mention it, but since this has come up perhaps it will help explain."

Jean looked up inquiringly.

"Up here in the North, Miss Jean, it is the custom of the young bucks to buy any little girl who takes his fancy. He pays for her while he is strong and a good hunter, you see. When the girl grows up he takes her for his wife."

There was a gasp of astonishment from Ellen and her sister, but Kilbuck went on:

"One hundred dollars is a mighty good price to pay for a wife, but Swimming Wolf, my little lady, came to me yesterday with four black fox skins, which are worth perhaps three thousand dollars. He wanted to know if I would arrange with the Big White Man—your brother-in-law—to take them in payment for the *shawut clate*, the White-Girl-Who-Makes-Singing-Birds-in-the-Little-Brown-Box."

Jean lifted her chin with a laugh in which amusement and embarrassment were equally mingled. "How quaintly ridiculous, Ellen, to describe my violin playing in such a way! But mercy," she added, after they had all laughed over the incident, "I must run away upstairs and put on some footwear. If I had kept on my shoes and stockings, as I should have done, Swimming Wolf might not have called me 'little squaw with white feet'!"

Kilbuck, satisfied with himself, had settled back once more against his cushions and as she turned to say a parting word to him, was regarding her with half-closed eyes. The firelight played on her slim, white ankles and soft little feet. He surveyed her with a

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look that slowly, appraisingly, stripped her body of its garments and swept her from her bare feet to her face and back again. The girl caught it. Conscious, for the first time of him—his savage reality as other than a middle-aged man—of her own womanhood, she flushed violently. Shrinking back she reached for Loll's hand, and stammering an incoherent excuse, ran from the room.

Ellen, unconscious of what had happened, measured off a row of stitches in the knitting she had again taken up. "Jean certainly seems to be tumbling in and out of adventures," she remarked. "Sometimes, Shane, I wonder if we did right in bringing her with us."

"Nonsense, Ellen. A year up here will make a different girl of her—help her break away from the cut and dried sameness of school life. Darned if it doesn't make me tired to see all the young women turned out of the same mould."

As Boreland spoke the door leading into the store opened slowly, and into the room sauntered Kayak Bill. He seated himself in silence, tilting his sombrero to the back of his head—the only concession to convention he ever made, since Kayak had never been known to remove that article of apparel until he sought his bunk at night.

"I just been mouchin' round down in the Village, Chief," he drawled, "seein' if there was anythin' a-doin' in the way o' local sin, and they tells me that the funeral canoes is a-comin' in tonight."

CHAPTER V

THE FUNERAL CANOES

ELLEN glanced up at the old hootch-maker sitting serenely on the other side of the fireplace. Some time during the day he had put on high leather boots but having neglected to lace them, the bellows-tongued tops stood away from his sturdy legs and the raw-hide laces squirmed about his feet like live things.

"The funeral canoes?" she echoed, wonderingly.

Kayak Bill turned to her with a sort of slow eagerness, as if he had been awaiting an excuse to look at her.

"Yas, Lady. They're a-bringin' in the ashes o' their dead kin from up in the Valley of the Kag-wan-tan."

Ellen's mind reverted to the many strange things she had heard during her short stay in Katleean, concerning the coming Potlatch of the Indians. This land and its people were new and mysterious to her. These primitive Thlingets, descendants of the fiercest and most intelligent of all the northern tribes were, withal, a fearful people living in a world of powerful and malignant spirits who frowned from the rocks, glittered from the cold, white mountains and glaciers, whispered in the trees and cackled derisively from the campfires; a world of hostile eyes spying upon them in the hope that

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some of their weird and mystic tabus might be broken, and of sly ears listening to avenge some careless remark. A childlike people they were, who spoke kindly to the winds and offered bits of fish for its favor; who begged the capricious sea to give them food, and who spent most of their lives working for the comfort of the dead—the Restless Ones—who sweep the winter skies when the day is done, beckoning, whispering. The Northern Lights the white man calls them, as they leap and play above the frozen peaks, but the Thlinget knows them to be the spirits of the dead, homeless in space but hovering confidently overhead until their relatives on earth can give a Potlatch for their repose.

Running like a black thread through the woof of the spirit tales was the mention of witch-craft—witch-craft with which Kilbuck was now preparing to deal; not because he hoped to benefit the natives and free them from the curse of superstition, but because owing to a belief in the black art, the Indians of Katleean were not bringing in the amount of furs expected, and this meant a loss of money to the Alaska Fur and Trading Company.

Ellen recalled the superior air of amusement with which the White Chief had told of the dominating belief in demons.

“When one of the beggars wants to cast a spell,” he had said, his lip curling in a sardonic smile, “he takes a bit of cloth from some garment his enemy has worn and at the hour of midnight slinks into a graveyard and digs down until he finds a body. If he wants to cripple his enemy’s hand, he puts the cloth in the fingers of the

corpse. If he wishes his enemy to lose his mind he puts it over the skull, and if he wants him dead, he places the cloth over the heart in the coffin. Oh, they are a sweet outfit, I tell you!" The Chief had laughed as if these things were merely amusing. Then he had gone on to explain that across the Bay of Katleean in the shadow of the great blue glacier which was discernible on sunny days, there had been a lonely Thlinget graveyard. Because of its isolation this burial place had been so riddled with re-opened graves and so much killing, torturing and fighting had ensued among the Indians in their efforts to detect and punish so-called witches that he, their White Chief, had been obliged to interfere. He had put an end to the reign of sorcery in that particular graveyard rather cleverly, Ellen was forced to admit, by having all the bodies exhumed and cremated on the spot.

"They'll bring the ashes over here where I can keep an eye on them and prevent further 'witching,' " the trader had finished. "And after the Potlatch we'll have a little peace in the country, I hope. I never interfere with the Potlatches. They make good business for the Company, for the brown heathens believe the spirits are really feasting and rejoicing with them." Kilbuck laughed as at some recollection. "The Company sends in hundreds of blankets every year for dead Indians. Whenever a Potlatch blanket is given away the name of a dead man is called and he receives it in the spirit world. Whenever a little food is put on the Potlatch fire, a dead man's name is mentioned and he gets a square meal up there in Ghost's Home. Altogether the

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Alaska Fur and Trading Company does a lively business with the dead!"

As Ellen thought on these things there crept into her mother-heart a feeling of pity for these simple, trusting people seeking the protection and guidance of this white man only to have their beliefs and superstitions laughed at and exploited for the benefit of his company. She was beginning to feel, dimly, what every reader of the history of exploration knows, that drunkenness, fraud and trickery are among the first teachings the white man's civilization brings to the tribes of a new country.

A tinge of sadness and foreboding darkened her thoughts.

Kayak Bill, who had been drawing contentedly on his corn-cob pipe, rose suddenly through a low-hung cloud of tobacco smoke, and taking up an old almanac from the table, began fanning the air clumsily. His slow drawl with a suspicion of haste in it, broke in on her meditations:

"By hell, Lady," he apologized earnestly, "excuse *me* for creatin' of such a blamed smudge!"

Ellen looked up from her knitting.

"Oh, I don't mind a little smoke, Kayak Bill." She smiled at the concern in the old man's voice. "You see Shane smokes a good deal, too." She nodded toward the couch where her husband puffed on his pipe as he plied Kilbuck with questions about the Island of Kon Klayu. "I was just thinking about the funeral canoes and the Potlatch."

"The beginnin's of the Potlatch will be pulled off

tomorrow, Lady, but tonight—" Kayak stopped fanning and leaned closer to her. Then with a glance in the direction of the White Chief he lowered his voice. "Tonight, when the funeral canoes comes in, I'd aim to gather in the young sprout, Loll, and that little gal sister o' yourn. . . . We're purty civilized here in Kat-leeen, but—wall, there ain't no tellin' what an Injine will do after he's taken on a couple o' snorts o' white mule,—or a squaw-man, either, for that matter. O' course, I make the stuff myself, and a mighty hard time I have, too, to keep shut o' these pesky dudes o' revenue officers that's all the time a-devilin' o' me. But I don't recommend it none a-tall."

Kayak Bill, with his boot-laces snaking along behind him, shuffled over to his chair once more and settled himself for conversation, which Ellen had learned meant a monologue. The edge of his sombrero backed his busy head and kindly face like a soiled grey halo. His low voice, never rising, never falling, droned on:

"Yas, I don't drink none myself, bein' weaned, as you might say, when I'm but a yearlin'. But I make it for those as likes it, and I makes it good, for it's everybody to his own cemetery, I say. . . . No, I don't join no Y. W. C. T. U. or nothin,' but one time, when I'm a real young feller, I'm off on the range for a spell down in Texas, and I ain't no nature for shavin' or none o' them doo-dads and besides I'd don't have no razor or no lookin' glass. Wall, six months or so goes millin' by and finally I comes down into San Antonio one Sataday night. And right away, havin' at that time

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what you might call an eddycated taste for whisky, I makes a charge for the nearest bar and takes on a dozen or so good snifters, likewise some beverages they calls mint juleps. And durn me, Lady, if in no time every-thing in that place ain't a-whizzin' past me like the mill-tails o' hell!

"But I gets my bearin's after while and lays my course for a door to get some fresh air. Just as I reaches this here door, Lady, a big, swaggerin' rough-lookin' hombre with a red beard starts to come in. Wall, I looks him over careful. He likewise gives me a nasty look. Then polite-like, I steps aside waitin' for him to come through. But he don't come none, havin' stepped aside too. . . . Wall, by this time I'm feelin' purty groggy and I makes a bolt for the door again, aimin' to get through quick; but blamed if that durned son-of-a-gun don't do identical! Then back I sashays once more and my dander sort o' riz up in me. 'By the roarin' Jasus,' I yells, 'you lay offen that monkey business, you consarned whiskery cuss, or I'll fill you so full o' holes yore own mammy won't know you from a hunk o' cheese. Just one more crack like that out o' you,' I says, 'and down comes yore meat-house,' I says. . . . Wall, I got started through the door again, and by hell, Lady, in spite o' my warnin' o' him, he comes at me again. So, . . ."

Kayak Bill paused the fraction of a second; then his voice went on with its accustomed languor: "So I just whipped out my little old .45 and shot him."

Ellen gasped, her big blue eyes opening in horror as she looked into the serene face of the self-confessed

murderer. Kayak Bill, apparently unconscious of her regard, droned on:

"Yas, I charged full tilt into him shootin' as I went, but instead o' him a-fallin dead, I finds myself in a shower o' glass, and all the boys is a-dancin' round me and likin' to die o' laughin' at me. . . . You see, Lady, that door happens to be one o' them long mirro's saloons has, and not havin' no acquaintance with myself in a beard a-tall, I pots my image! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Kayak Bill's laugh gurgled out slowly like mellow liquor from a wide-mouthed bottle. "Wall, after I got done a-payin' for the mirro' and a-settin' 'em up for the boys, and a-payin' for a saw bones to fix me up—me bein' conside-ble carved by glass, I don't have no more money than a jack-rabbit. So I says to myself: 'Bill, you ol' jackass, you got to reform, that's all there are to it. We can't have the whole durned world laughin' at you when yore in yore liquor!', I says. . . . And I did reform, Lady! So help me Hannah, I did!" Kayak Bill, with an air of conscious virtue, was filling his pipe again.

While Ellen gathered up her knitting, the corners of her mouth were twitching with amusement.

"Kayak Bill," she said as she shook her finger at him playfully, "you surely have an effective way of making a confession. I don't really know whether to praise you for your sobriety or scold you for horrifying me a moment ago."

Ellen heard the old man's chuckle as she arose. Her face went sober, however, the moment her eyes sought the couch where her husband sat still engrossed with the

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White Chief. Though she lingered Shane did not turn her way, and she finally moved toward the door through which her sister had gone an hour earlier.

"Thank you for telling me about tonight, Kayak," she said as she passed him. "I'm going up now to warn Jean and Loll, but—" she hesitated, "I wish more of the men in Katleean had been 'weaned' as you were."

She saw approval in the slow softening of his hazel eyes, and as the door closed behind her she caught a remark the old hootch-maker addressed to the dog at his feet.

"By hell, Kobuk," he pronounced earnestly, "that little lady's husband has sure fell into a bed of four leaf clovers!"

She stored this quaint tribute away in her mind and told it to Jean that evening after she had repeated for the second time Kayak's warning regarding the arrival of the funeral canoes. But Jean, determined not to miss any detail of the strange Thlinget festival, watched till an opportunity presented itself, and then, disregarding Ellen's advice, slipped away to the beach to a pile of silvery drift-logs that lay at the edge of the rice-grass, where she knew she could not be seen except from the sea. The girl settled herself comfortably among the logs just as the long day was waning.

She noted that here, as everywhere else in this northern land of exquisite, fleeting summers, the sunset colors came on gradually, increasing in richness of tone and fading through several hours. The mist of the afternoon had scattered before a faint sea-wind, and settled wraithlike in the hollows of the hills across the bay.

Violet now in the gloaming it melted into the lilac shadows at the base of the range that needled the sunset sky.

There was something like promise in the wild beauty of the evening-time; something in the clean night-scent of the sea and the grass and the trampled beach-weed that awakened in Jean a sense of expectancy. She breathed deeply, conscious of a keen delight in doing so. As she waited, the rose and amber tints died on the white peaks at the head of the valley, . . . the flaming orange behind them turned from clear gold to vermillion, . . . from rose madder to an unearthly red that glowed behind a veil of amethyst while the twilight deepened. . . .

Suddenly she caught her breath. Out of the powdery, purple gloom across the bay floated a long line—the funeral canoes. In the blurred distance they took shape one by one, the paddles dipping in solemn rhythm. . . . Nearer they came, . . . and nearer. Then over the darkening water drifted the plaintive rise and fall of the funeral lament, faint and eerie as voices from the spirit land.

Jean, thinking to linger but a moment before returning to the store, was spellbound by the mystery and loneliness of the scene. All at once, as she watched, a line of silent, blanketed figures from somewhere behind, began to slip down past her hiding place. Looming weird and tall in the dusk they halted at the water's edge. Softly, almost imperceptibly these waiting ones took up the mournful plaint, sending it floating out thin and high in answer to the approaching bearers of the dead.

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While she listened awe and wonder began to give way to something that tantalized her with a fleeting familiarity—a near understanding. Long-lost memories of primeval things that eluded her when she strove to vision them mocked her with an indefinable yearning to pierce the ages of oblivion that separated her from other nights, other scenes, other chants like these. . . . She longed for her violin. If she could but feel the loved instrument beneath her chin, her fingers drawing from its vibrant lower strings the mystery-music to supplement the weird dirge, these primitive things hidden in the dust of the past might be revealed to her!

Suddenly she became aware that one of the tall figures had stopped in the trail beside her pile of driftwood. In a tone singularly pleasing he was humming the air of the funeral lament, fitfully, experimentally at first, then as the haunting monotony of the strain became familiar, with a certain easy confidence. Jean forgot to be afraid. Almost unconsciously she found herself humming in unison with the motionless figure. Even when the man faced her and she saw in the dim light, not an Indian, but the young white man, Gregg Harlan, she did not cease. She was conscious of a feeling of companionship. Night had gilded the wilderness with a primordial beauty and made her kin to all earth's creatures. She moved slowly from her pile of driftwood and stood beside him for a moment in the trail watching the incoming canoes. It was a moment of simplicity and unconsciousness of self such as might have been in the dawn of civilization when conventions were unknown. She hummed, cradling in her heart

impressions of the night so that later she might awaken them through the music of her violin. The man in the trail continued his wordless song. . . .

The crunching of leather soles on the gravel behind them startled Jean. She and her companion turned simultaneously to find themselves face to face with the trader of Katleean.

"Well, well!" The sarcastic voice of the White Chief shattered the sweet, wild moment like an invidious thing. "You two seem to be getting uncommonly friendly!" His red lip lifted on one side into a cynical smile that suddenly infuriated Jean, implying, as it did, that he had caught the two young people in a compromising situation. She took a hasty step toward him, looking with fearless eyes into his face.

"How dare you slip up behind us this way!" she flashed, stamping her foot and flinging out her hands in a short, angry gesture. A moment longer she looked at him as if he were an object of scorn, then turning to the young man, said quietly: "Good night, Mr. Harlan."

The next instant she was walking up the dusky trail to the post.

Kilbuck watched her go. Accustomed to commanding all situations at Katleean, he was for the moment nonplused by the quickness and vehemence of the girl's retort, rather than by what she had said. He had expected to place the two at a disadvantage. Finding the tables turned, a momentary and unreasoning desire to cover his own discomfiture by hurting some one took possession of him.

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"I say, Gregg, I'm rather surprised to find you at this time of night, alone with Miss Wiley. I don't think her sister would approve, exactly. Since your affair with Naleenah, you know—" he finished the sentence with a depreciatory shrug.

"My affair with Naleenah! What do you mean?" The young man took a quick step toward him.

"Oh, now, don't get excited, Gregg. You were drunk, of course, but you must remember she took you home and spent the last night of her life with you. The whole post saw you two go off together the night the *Hoonah* came in. Boreland has heard the talk, of course. Too bad, my boy," the Chief put his hand on the astonished young fellow's shoulder, "too bad, I say, that after all your fastidious virtue you have the reputation of being a squaw-man." Kilbuck laughed his short, sardonic laugh.

"*She* thinks I'm a squaw-man?" Gregg indicated the disappearing figure of Jean. His voice was sharp with hurt amazement, indignation, and the grasp of his hand on the Chief's arm made that gentleman wince.

"All of them do, my boy. *All* of them. But——"

"Now I begin to understand," Harlan broke in bitterly. With a muttered imprecation he flung himself into the trail and walked toward the courtyard where a light shone palely from Kayak Bill's window. The White Chief looked after him until he vanished. Gregg had been sober for a week now, but if Kilbuck was any judge of indications, the bookkeeper's sobriety was at an end. As the trader turned toward the beach and walked to the canoes now landing in the dusk, he smiled

to think how neatly he had nipped in the bud any possible romance between Gregg and Jean.

Two hours later in the loft above Kilbuck's living quarters Jean was kneeling at a tiny window looking up at the ridge where dark spruce trees peaked a line against the night sky. It was a strange guest chamber pungent with a faint, unforgettable odor from fox pelts dangling from the rafters, bear hides tacked to the slanting roof, and rows of smoked salmon and dried cod hanging from lines along the sides. Loll lay fast asleep on his small floor-pallet, his face half-buried in his pillow, his mouth reverted to the pout of babyhood. The door leading to Ellen's room—the only real room in the loft, was partly open. Jean rose and closed it, took up her violin from her own floor bed, and went back to the window.

Softly fingering the strings she picked out the notes of the Indian lament that kept repeating itself in her mind. She was possessed by a desire to express in music the mystery of the wilderness afterglow, the wild, illusive feeling that had touched her. She longed to use her bow freely on the strings of her violin until, at one with the instrument, she could lose herself in the ecstasy of creation. . . . She reached for the bow that lay on the floor beside her. Perhaps, if she played very softly she might disturb no one——

Up from the courtyard, as if a door had been suddenly opened, came startling sounds—short yells, Indian war-whoops and the maudlin singing of white men. The mournful, prolonged howl of a dog drifted in from somewhere. Down in the direction of the Indian

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village half a dozen shots were fired in rapid succession. Jean's heart beat oddly. Katleean was beginning to celebrate the Potlatch in the singular way of the male, who, since time immemorial has made a holiday an occasion for a carousal. The girl sighed, and placed her violin gently on the floor. With her chin in her hands she took her former position at the window and listened.

Somewhere near the store a trio began. The blended harmony of men's voices as they sang in the dusk had in it a peculiar stir. Jean found herself, head up and shoulders swaying, responding to the lilt and swing of the air :

“Hear the rattle of our windlass
As the anchor comes away ;
For we're bound for Old Point Barrow
And we make our start today.”

Rollicking, devil-may-care, the whaling song went on through long verses. Many of the words she could not distinguish, but throughout the singing she was aware of a feeling that these singers were men who had cast aside the restraint of conventions, even in a way, responsibility for conduct, and were exulting in their freedom.

Thinking the song finished she turned away at last, but the movement was arrested by the sound of a lone baritone taking up the chorus again. She leaned over the sill to catch the words, for in the voice she recognized her companion of the drift logs.

"Up into the Polar Seas
Where the greasy whalers be,
There's a strip of open water
Leading north to eighty-three,
Where the frisky seal and walrus
On the ice floes bask and roll,
And the sun comes up at midnight
From an ice-pack round the Pole."

Apprehension in the girl's heart vanished. She drew a deep breath of the night air and turned reluctantly from the window. "There's a strip of open water leading north to eighty-three—" she hummed. The words stirred in her dim, venturesome imaginings. She felt suddenly on the threshold of adventure beyond which might lie the fierce, wild things of romance that only men have known. It alarmed, even while it exhilarated her. She felt afraid, yet daring. She was beginning to feel the lure of Alaska—the vast, the untamed, the inscrutable, the promising.

As she slipped between her blankets she thought of the young white man. Squaw-man he might be, and a drunkard, but he had the heart of an adventurer . . . he was young . . . and he could sing . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE CHIEF MAKES MEDICINE

SUNLESS and softly grey morning came to Katleean. The water, smooth as satin, stretched away to the mist-shrouded hills. Owing to some odd, mirage-like condition of the atmosphere trees bordering the lagoon across the bay stood high and clear above a bank of fog. The liquid music of the surf was hushed as if to give place to a new sound that pulsed unceasingly on the quiet air: the strange and thrilling boom of Thlinget drums. Up from the great Potlatch-house in the Village floated the savage resonance adding a barbaric note of announcement to the placid beauty of the scene. Above the roofs of the native houses and straight between the totems of the Thunder-bird and the Bear, rose the black smoke of the Potlatch fire.

Though it was early, the double doors of the trading-post stood open for the White Chief had been abroad several hours. After a night of revelry in Katleean there were always knife-wounds to dress, battered heads to bind up, bullets to extract, and even broken bones to set. The nearest doctor was five hundred miles away and Kilbuck, often the only sober man at the post, with the exception of Kayak Bill, performed these services.

Some said that he had learned all he knew of medical

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science from the row of gold-lettered volumes tucked away in one corner of his dusky living-room; others claimed that a great eastern medical college had known him as a student in the far-off days before Alaska took him for her own. Whatever was the source of his knowledge he did his work with a degree of rough skill, and humanely, using as an antidote for the pain he inflicted during these operations, stupendous quantities of the very liquor which had brought about his patients' troubles.

Among the Kagwantans of the Thlinget people he had been given the rank of Shaman, or medicine man. To further his own ends and to keep his hold on the natives, he had always donned the robes that went with this conferred honor and had taken an active part in the Potlatch ceremonies. As the years went by, with but four steamers a twelve-month to disturb his voluntary exile and but a waning interest in anything south of Dixon's Entrance, he had grown to have a real enjoyment in these affairs. They served to banish any lingering inhibitions imposed by civilization.

As he walked across the courtyard toward the little cabin of Silvertip and his squaw, Senott, there were thoughtful lines in the White Chief's brow. Today he would have an opportunity to impress the white women with his importance among the wild people of the North. Today Ellen Boreland should see him as the great chief and Shaman, banisher of Thlinget sorcery. But—how far might he go in this character without running the risk of becoming ridiculous? Never before had such an audience taxed his powers of discrimi-

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nation. True, by subtle speeches, he had prepared his visitors for anything that might happen, and he knew they would excuse much that was bizarre on his own part because of his explanation that such ways were necessary in handling a primitive people. But he also knew that there is but a thin dividing line between savage pomp and ludicrous ostentation.

As he neared Silvertip's door he raised his head decisively and mounting the steps entered without knocking.

His glance swept the small room with its snowy sand-scoured floor, its rectangular box-stove of sheet-iron, and two corner bunks, one above the other.

"Well, Silvertip, you and Harlan are the last ones on my list. I can't find *him* any place, but I see you've come to anchor all right. What's the matter with you?" He addressed the wan-looking Silvertip in the lower bunk.

A long-drawn sigh quivered up from the blankets, and with a shaking hand the Swede indicated his head.

"My ol' ooman (groan) . . . lick hal outen me . . . (groan)!"

Kilbuck bent down and parted the fair, blood-matted hair on the side of his patient's head.

"Oh, you're not much hurt, man. You and Senott ought to learn to take a little drink together without beating each other up this way." He laughed as he made ready to cleanse the cut. "May I inquire where the lady is this morning?"

Between groans the injured husband profanely unburdened himself:

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"She go down de tam Injune house vit dat tam Injune hunter, Hoots-noo!"

"Trouble with you, Silver, you're too good to women. Now, instead of using the iron hand on them you show the yellow streak——"

"Me—jallow streak?" The indignant Swede raised his battered head to glare into the eyes of his satiric physician. "Vy, tammit, Chief, ven ay ban cook on *Soofie Suderlant* ay——"

"That reminds me, Silvertip," interrupted the White Chief. "You remember telling me about stopping for water on the Island of Kon Klayu when you were whaling? Yes? . . . Well, while you are lying here sobering up, I want you to think about that island, Silver. I want you to remember every little thing about it that you can, and after the Potlatch I'll be in to talk to you—perhaps. I'll go and hunt up Harlan now. Damned fool! He raised hell last night—something started him off. No doubt he's down around the Point swimming it off now. Queer how that fellow loves water—on the outside of his skin."

The trader left the cabin and started across the courtyard. It had gradually filled up with multi-colored, grotesque figures that might have stepped from the pages of some weird, fantastic fairy-tale. The never-ceasing beat of the Potlatch drums made a throbbing, low accompaniment to their guttural tones and laughter. They stalked about wrapped in heavy broadcloth blankets adorned with designs and borders made of white pearl buttons—thousands of buttons—a style which had come in when the white traders came to

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Alaska. Many wore the native Chilcat blanket of ceremony made of the hair of the mountain goat. These were marvels of savage embroidery done in conventionalized designs that might have startled a Cubist painter had they not been woven with the softest-toned native dyes—yellow, pale-blue and green and rust. Huge, fierce detached eyes, the Thlinget symbol of intelligence glared from some. Mouths with queer, squared lips and large teeth grinned from others. A school of killer-whales with dorsal fins aloft, disported themselves in rectangles of black on the back of another. From the bottom a two-foot fog-colored fringe dangled about the wearer's legs.

Above the fantastic robes black eyes looked out from painted faces rendered fearsome by red and blue and green designs representing mythical gods of the clouds, waves, and beasts, fish and birds. Heads were crowned with the skulls of grizzly bears and small whales. A few figures were disguised by pelts of animals, but instead of paws, huge wooden hands with fingers more than a foot long, dangled from the forearms.

Swimming Wolf, brave in a dance-blanket which bore the wolf emblem of the Kagwantans, held his head proudly under the sacred hat of Kahanuk, the Wolf, and on his face in red and blue was the Kia-sa-i-da, the red mouth of the wolf when the lips are retracted.

As the White Chief made his way through the throng he noted with satisfaction that Ellen Boreland and her sister were standing spellbound in the doorway of the trading-post watching the primitive masquerade. Even as he looked a creature broke suddenly from the crowd

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and rushed toward them, half-running, half-flopping like a wounded bird. To one side of its face half a moustache was attached. The other cheek was adorned with red and blue paint. The hair was twisted into a high peak and further decorated with the wings of a seagull. A man's hair-seal waistcoat trimmed with red flannel hung from the shoulders and from this streamed yards of brilliant colored calico strips an inch wide.

As the figure reached the platform, the two white women shrank back in the doorway. The half-portion of the moustache was raised in a delighted grin.

"Heavens, Ellen!" gasped Jean, clutching her sister's arm. "It's that jolly little Senott, Silvertip's squaw. The one that brought us the strawberries the other day!"

Senott, proud in her Potlatch finery, came close and gazed with friendly eyes at the white visitors.

"Ha! Ha!" she laughed. "You not know Senott? Senott all same *kate-le-te*—all same seagull!" She threw out her arms raising them up and down and lifting high her feet to represent a seagull alighting at the edge of breaking surf.

"Bime-by you white 'oomans come along Senott—" she pointed in the direction of Kilbuck's living-room windows under which he had caused a great grave to be dug. "You come. Senott show you t'ings."

With a wide smile and a wave of her hand the gay Senott, apparently forgetful of the white spouse at home nursing the broken head she had given him, flapped away to join her Indian lover, Hoots-noo,

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Heart-of-a-Grizzly, the handsome young husband of Old-Woman-Who-Would-Not-Die.

At noon every soul in Katleean had assembled in front of the trading-post. The boom of drums was louder. There was a feeling of expectancy in the air. The few whites, with the exception of Kilbuck, sat on the platform in front of the store. The natives formed a shifting, motley crowd in the courtyard. Kayak Bill, sitting next to Ellen, smoked his pipe as he contemplated the scene.

"Wall, Lady," he drawled, leaning toward her, "I seen a heap o' this sort o' jaberwocky doin's in my time up here, and it used to make me feel like as if them Injines had a tank full o' doodle-bugs under their hair—but I don't know—Take us white folks down in the States now, when we're a-celebratin' o' Decoration day without our speeches and our peerades and our offerin's o' posies and such. It's the same principle exact——"

The old man ceased speaking abruptly. Out of the door behind them and down the platform steps walked the White Chief of Katleean and the little Thlinget woman, Decitan. About her shoulders was draped a fringed black and yellow blanket of wondrous design. On her dark, thick hair she wore the crest of the Eagle clan—a privilege accorded only to a chiefess.

The waiting Indians stood back from about these two principal figures in the courtyard, and Paul Kilbuck, with the Indian woman beside him, turned to face the white woman on the platform whose favors he hoped to win.

He felt himself splendidly barbaric in the costume of

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a Shaman. The greens and blues and yellows of his royal Chilcat blanket and dancing shirt set off his dark beard and dead-white skin. Carved wooden eagle-wings on each side of a tall hat crowned his hair. Below this emblem of the Shaman spirit, the Unseeable, his eyes, narrow, pale and dangerous sent straight into those of Ellen a look that might have come down through the red pages of history.

She turned her face away with a frightened quickening of the pulses.

The White Chief and Decitan took their places at the head of the Indian procession which had been forming, and the long, fantastic line wound about the courtyard and down the trail that led to the Village. Before the graveyard, with its totems and curious architecture of the dead, they stopped and began a mournful ululation.

The wailing gradually gave way to the Potlatch songs in honor of the deceased—songs of curious rhythm and halting cadences; songs with a haunting plaintiveness that floated high above the throbbing of the drums.

On the platform the white inhabitants of Katleean waited in silence until the procession came back once more to the courtyard. Then one by one they attached themselves to the line.

About the excavation under the windows of the White Chief the funeral party halted. Kilbuck, his handsome, barbaric head towering above all, spoke to the natives in Thlinget a few moments. Then one by one the small boxes containing ashes of the dead were handed to him. He lowered them into the grave. As the last one settled on the bottom he stepped back,

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flinging one corner of his fringed blanket from his shoulder. He exulted in the sense of power such an occasion gave him. He liked to feel that in the hollow of his hand he held every soul in Katleean.

Perhaps in his heart there still lurked some faint respect for the dead. Perhaps he merely intended to impress the white women in his audience, as from under the bizarre robe of his heathen office he produced a prayer-book, and in the voice he knew so well how to modulate, read the service for the dead. At the close he swept the gathering with an inclusive glance. First in Thlinget, then in English he addressed his listeners:

"People of the Kagwantans, of the Wuckitans, of the Yakutats, and the Ganahadi,"—His voice made music of the Indians names.—"Listen to the talk I make and remember. Always, while I am the White Chief and Medicine Man of the Kagwantans, I will watch over the ashes of my brown brothers and sisters. Always, when the nights of the Big Snows come to Katleean and the spirit-lights whisper in the North in the moon of Kokwa-ha, I, the Unseeable, will watch. . . . Always, in the moons of the Big Salmon run, the Hat-dee-se, when there is no darkness in the nights of the North, I, the Unseeable, will watch. . . . I, who have brought you the great white medicine of the Letquan, the Snow People, I make the Big Medicine now—I make it with the sacred book of the White Shamans." He held one corner of his Chilcat blanket tightly against his breast with the prayer-book, and with the other out at arm's length, swept the fringes slowly back and forth over the grave. "I make the

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Big Medicine. . . . My brothers and sisters may rest in peace at Katleean, for no witch can dig down into the grave below to work evil spells. . . . I, the White Chief, the Unseeable, I am always watching."

The solemn old Indians of the tribe nodded their masked heads approvingly and gave grunts of satisfaction. Kilbuck turned away as if a bit weary of his rôle and walked toward the trading-post. The white members of his audience followed him.

After the departure of their foreign visitors the natives assumed an alertness strangely at variance with their usual stolid demeanor. Kilbuck, with his white guests, watched them from his living-room windows.

Blanket after blanket was spread over the boxes of ashes in the grave. Bolt after bolt of bright calico was torn into streamers and flung into the open space. Cooking utensils and food came next; then trinkets of every kind that might cheer the souls of the departed on their journey over the Spirit Trail. At the very last, Swimming Wolf, who had heretofore taken little part in the ceremonies, stepped forward with a tiny phonograph, a rare possession since it was the only one in the Village. The Indian carefully wound it up and lowered it into the hole. There was a craning of masked heads, . . . a period of grunting approval, . . . and then faintly from below came a whirring, a sputtering and a high, cracked voice of announcement. The White Chief's face wore its sardonic smile as the gravel was being shoveled into the grave for the little tin phonograph was bravely playing: *There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight.*

CHAPTER VII

THE POTLATCH DANCE

EVENING found the Boreland family, attended by Kayak Bill, taking the beach trail to the Village. It was well past nine o'clock and the twilight had merged into the soft, luminous duskiness that would continue until the sun came up at two-thirty in the morning.

In the gloom a hundred blanket-covered canoes lined the crescent beach that sloped gently upward to a strip of gravel before the row of Indian houses. The totems of the Thunder-bird and the Bear stood out high against the sky. Before the Potlatch-house an Indian dog, small, coyote-like, yelped shrilly as he tugged at the rope which fastened him to a stake. The air throbbed to the incessant beat of drums and the muffled chant that rose and fell inside the meeting-place.

The Potlatch-house, older than the oldest Indian at Katleean, had been built before ever a white man had set foot on the beach of the Village. The low building, over sixty feet square, was made of huge, hand-hewed yellow cedar planks standing vertically. The gable ends faced the bay and all across the triangular space above the eaves was painted the startling

conventionalized head of a wolf. The ears rose weirdly from the gable edge of the roof. Two monster eyes glared through the twilight above a grinning, squared mouth twenty feet across. On either side of the oval door stood a totem, hollow at the base and containing the ashes of long-dead chiefs. The corner-posts were carved into life-size grotesque figures of men.

Between Ellen and Jean sauntered Kayak Bill. Their half-fearful looks at the Potlach-house were inspired by the stories he had told, with a certain grim amusement, to these two fair women of the South. They were stories told to him over the hootch-cup by the wicked Old-Woman-Who-Would-Not-Die; tales of the long-ago heathen times when the Potlatch-house was erected and dedicated with human sacrifices; when for each of those carved corner-posts a slave had been murdered and placed at the bottom of the hole that was to receive it; tales of scores of slaves who had been slaughtered upon its completion; tales of animal-like orgies those walls had seen—cannibal feasts, torture of witches, fiendish carousals about the burning dead.

Tame, indeed, in comparison were the Potlatches of this day, even when the savage spirit was stimulated by the white man's fire-water. And tonight there could be none of that. In honor of the white women, Kayat Bill was keeping drink from the Indians this one evening.

Ellen looked at Jean apprehensively as they pressed closely on the heels of Shane Boreland and followed him through the low, oval door of the Potlatch-house.

Inside the air was thick with the smoke of many

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pipes. Through the haze the wall lights burned dimly. All about the sides of the great room squatted natives in their Potlatch finery. At the farther end sat the drummers beating in booming rhythm on war-drums made of hair-seal stretched over rings from hollowed logs. Never during the three days of the Potlatch did those drumbeats cease.

Near the doorway was a small slightly-raised platform. On this, in his Shaman robes, sat the White Chief of Katleean. As they ascended the step he rose ceremoniously to greet them and indicated some chairs near him which had been placed in anticipation of their coming.

When the white visitors had seated themselves the drum-beats took on a quicker staccato rhythm. There was a craning of necks toward the doorway. Another moment and the chief dancer of the Potlatch entered the oval.

Dancing in backwards so that the decorations on his blanket were displayed to the best advantage he sang a halting Thlinget song and scattered the down of eagles about him. In the middle of the room he whirled and Ellen recognized Swimming Wolf.

"If the feathers fall on you," said the White Chief leaning toward her, "you'll have good luck all the year."

Other dancers backed in and took their places about the drummers. As Swimming Wolf stepped forward the drum-beats died to a muffled softness. The dancing sticks beat the floor in a low, sensuous syncopation that stirred the blood. The long-fringed blanket lent a wild grace to the Indian's swaying, stamping figure. His

crouched steps seemed part of his faint, humming chant.

Curious at first, and a little apprehensive, Ellen looked on, her hand clasping that of her husband. After a while, the steady pulsing of the drums banished that something faintly like foreboding with which the civilized woman looks for the first time on primitive ceremonies; it even stirred in her something that she seemed once to have known and forgotten.

By the time Swimming Wolf had finished his steps she had withdrawn her hand from that of Shane and was anticipating with eager interest what was coming next.

She had not long to wait for the oval door swung on its peg and into the room lumbered a huge brown bear so true to life in form and gait that both she and Jean gave a startled gasp. The White Chief smiled as he leaned toward them.

"It's only Hoots-noo, Heart-of-a-Grizzly, dressed in a bear hide!"

The Indian must have spent many hours studying the actions and habits of his ferocious namesake, for in the pantomime that followed he gave a perfect imitation of the great bear of the North. Shambling down toward the center of the floor he paused. Striking a pose he made a motion as if jumping into a river to catch a salmon. With a floundering of his ungainly body he brought the fish up on the bank of the stream. He turned his uplifted muzzle from side to side as if scenting danger and presently proceeded to tear the fish into pieces, his head continually moving as though looking and listening for the hunter's rifle.

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Hoots-noo's performance was followed by other clever impersonations and by more solo dances of blanketed Indians. All the dances, the White Chief told Ellen, were taken from the movements of the wild things of the North—the slinking of the fox across the tundra, the leaping of the King salmon in the river, the flight of the eagle over the fishing grounds.

When the general dance was announced every Thlinget buck sprang to his feet and sought a partner of the opposite sex. About the room in a circle the fantastic figures leaped with savage abandon. When the tired couples sought the resting places against the walls again and each buck gallantly presented his partner with a small bag of raisins—a custom introduced by the enterprising white traders.

Faster and more softly came the boom and thud of drums and dancing sticks, until the urge of them caused even Ellen's feet to beat time to the primitive music. She glanced at her sister. Jean's eyes were sparkling. Her lithe body was swaying and her hands moving in rhythm with the Thlinget's dance.

"For two cents, Ellen, I'd dance with my admirer, Swimming Wolf!" She laughed in her sister's ear. "I feel the stir of the blood of our remote ancestors, who must have stepped it off in some such manner as this. . . . Look at your son, El!"

Loll, by now regarding every Indian as his friend, was standing before Senott. That dusky belle was resting after a mad, joyous whirl with Hoots-noo, Heart-of-a-Grizzly. The boy's head was nodding with earnestness as he talked to her, and he was playing

with the dozen gold and silver bracelets which adorned the gay one's shapely arms. Suddenly, with a laugh, Senott rose from the floor and grasping the boy's hands began to circle about the room with him. The drummers and holders of the dancing sticks showed their white teeth in delighted grins and quickened the rhythm of their music.

"By ginger," said Shane, his lean face alight with interest, "I'd like to shake a leg myself. Ellen—" he turned to his wife—"what you say?"

Ellen shook her head, smiling. "Take Jean, dear. She's wild to dance."

Shane turned to his sister-in-law. Laughing, she gave him her hand and the two stepped down and joined the bizarre throng. The smiling natives paused a moment to watch as the white couple improvised steps to suit the music, then the dance went on as before.

The drum-beats grew wilder, more stirring. The room grew warmer and the lights burned dimmer. Kayak Bill sitting between Ellen and Paul Kilbuck, attempted a monologue, but finding no listeners, gave it up to puff contentedly.

The fumes of Kayak's pipe seemed overly strong to Ellen. She began to feel the need of fresh air. She glanced at her sister and her husband as they passed her, laughing over an intricate step they told her was the "Bear Paw." Kayak Bill and the White Chief seemed buried in their own thoughts. Ellen rose, looked about her a moment and then slipped quietly out of the oval door into the cool, star-spangled night.

After the close air of the Potlatch-house, it was good

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to draw in the freshness of the out-of-doors. The two tall totems framed a golden naked moon that hung above the hills across the bay. The shimmering path from its glow threw into silhouette the prows of the big canoes drawn up on the beach. Ellen walked down the sandy path toward them. Pausing she leaned against one and gazed idly out across the water.

For the moment the chanting of the natives had ceased, and the drum-beats sounded muffled and soothing. Weird and lonely from a distant ridge came the faint call of a wolf, presaging, though she did not know it, an early winter. She became aware of the aromatic savors of the wild—sea smells, the forest breath, the tang of camp-smokes. She was beginning to like these things.

There was a sense of dream-like unreality about the night—about her whole life at Katleean. Sometimes she caught herself marveling that she was not more startled, more surprised at the new ways of life that had come to her, for it is only the seasoned traveler in the little known places of the world who ceases to marvel at the adaptability of man to new and strange environment. Alaska, especially, Ellen thought, seemed to work strange spells on those who came to dwell within her borders. What would be considered melodramatic and foolish south of 53, became somehow, natural and fitting above the line.

Her drifting thoughts were suddenly checked by the sound of soft footsteps in the sand behind her. She turned swiftly. Her dreamy, contemplative mood changed to one closely akin to panic, as out of the

shadows tall and dominant in his Potlatch robes, the White Chief stalked toward her.

She had no tangible reason for fearing to be alone with the trader of Katleean, and she despised herself now for the impulse that urged her to run as fast as she could from the man. Mentally upbraiding herself for her foolishness she forced a smile of greeting and in her haste to say something that would put the meeting on a commonplace basis, burst out with the inane and obvious:

"Isn't it a beautiful night, Mr. Kilbuck?"

The White Chief stopped beside her and flung back the blanket from his shoulder. There was a lawless gleam in the narrow eyes he turned on her and she was not unaware of a certain savage, picturesque appeal in him. She felt again a strange, undesired impulse that had troubled her ever since her first meeting with the man—the urge to go close and look deep into his pale, hypnotic eyes.

"On nights like this, Mrs. Boreland," he said, his tones low, almost caressing, "I always think of those lines—perhaps you know them:

"'Press close, magnetic, nourishing Night!
Night of the South Winds! Night of the few large stars!
Still, nodding Night. Mad, naked summer night!'" . . .

Despite herself, Ellen thrilled under the magic of his voice. He went on: "It's the memory of such nights that bring me back to this country year after year, and then . . . when I return . . . there is only the mocking beauty of their loneliness."

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Ellen knew but little of the "good, grey poet," but at the incongruity of his quoting she gazed with a new curiosity at this tall figure in the heathen splendor of a Thlinget witch-doctor.

"To be satisfying," he said softly, "beauty like this must be shared with a loved woman. . . ." his sweeping gesture indicating the moonlit bay of Katleean. "*You* are the first white woman to share it with me."

He stepped closer to her. Though there were three feet between them she felt his presence as a tangible thing. She stirred uneasily. The dull throb of the drums filled a moment's space.

"I have loved many women," his low voice went on, "women—of a sort—but never anyone like. . . ." There was something tenderly personal in the omitted word. "Sometimes . . . I wonder . . . if I might not be a better man if I had someone like you to stand beside me when winter nights come, and watch the Northern Lights. . . ."

Kilbuck looked dreamily away toward the peaks raising their subtle loveliness to the stars. Doubtless he must have said the same things slightly varied to many women in the States, but never before had Nature provided such a setting for his posing. Doubtless it had always made a favorable appeal, for Ellen knew that man, though doing exactly as he pleases, is ever holding out his hand to woman to be uplifted, and the mother instinct in the feminine heart seldom fails to respond.

Ellen felt suddenly that the situation was getting beyond her. As she leaned against the canoe she tried

in vain to think of some ordinary thing which would change the current of the White Chief's thoughts and enable her to get away to the Potlatch-house without his becoming aware of her perturbation. Fumbling uneasily with the handkerchief in her hand she dropped it. As she stooped to pick it up an exclamation escaped her. She had been resting her head against the up-curving prow of the canoe, and now, as she moved, she became aware, by a sharp painful tug, that her hair had become entangled in some torn rivets embedded in the tarpaulin.

Instantly Kilbuck was behind her reaching across her shoulders to release the strands. They refused to come away.

After a moment of ineffectual tugging, Ellen removed a pin from the soft, thick coil. Loosed by their efforts with the tangle, her hair shook down and tumbled in a lustrous mass below her waist. She felt Kilbuck's fingers working at the strands about the broken rivet.

Suddenly he was still, his hand grasping a long strand of the mass.

"Mrs. Boreland, there is a superstition among the Thlingets to the effect that whenever a man carries a lock of a white woman's hair he is protected from any kind of violence—no matter what he may have done to deserve punishment. Your hair is of such a rare shade and texture, there would be no mistaking a lock of it, would there?"

With a swift movement his hand slipped beneath the Chilcat blanket. There was a glint of steel, and the

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next moment he had severed the lock from the shining mass. Ellen started back, snatching up her hair to wind it into its accustomed knot, but before she could utter the words that sprang to her lips there was a sound of running footsteps.

"Ellen! Ellen!" came the voice of Jean, as the girl sped toward them down the pathway. "I've been looking everywhere for you!"

She glanced at the White Chief with surprise, suspicion and disapproval succeeding each other in her eyes. She made no effort to conceal her dislike of the trader of Katleean.

"Come, Ellen. Let's go back to Shane."

Jean took her sister's hand and the White Chief watched their retreating figures for several moments. . . . From beneath his blanket he drew the long lock of hair he had stolen. One hand passed gently, caressingly along the length of it. It clung softly to his finger like a live thing. . . . The hair of native women was long and thick, but coarse, and even after long residence in the trader's quarters seemed to hold the faint salmon tang of the smoke-house. But this. . . . His lip lifted in his wolfish smile. It would be difficult, very difficult indeed for a wife to explain his possession of such a trifle. . . . He held it against his mouth. The faint perfume of the white woman thrilled him. His nostrils twitched. He felt his eyes grow narrow as when he sighted game on the trail. . . . Suddenly, as if in decision, he turned and walked rapidly up the beach toward his quarters at the trading-post.

In his living-room, dark now except for a few dull

embers in the fireplace, he lighted a candle and crossed to the corner beneath the high shelf of books. He drew aside a large hair-seal wall-pocket of Indian make, and fumbled a moment. A small door swung open revealing a hollow in the log wall.

Very carefully the White Chief wrapped the lock of hair in a handkerchief and laid it away in the hiding place. As carefully he drew out a small moose-hide poke and putting the candle on a nearby table, sat down before it. He removed the tag attached to the top and read the inscription: "Eldorado Creek gold," then he loosened the string.

On the wall behind the man, weird, gigantic shadows, born of the flickering candle flame, leaped and danced. In the crude light and shade his barbaric gorgeousness became doubly sinister, as he pushed the strange shaman headdress farther back on his dark head.

He wiped an ash-tray carefully and poured the contents of the poke into it. Beautifully yellow and gleaming it fell in a golden stream—perhaps two ounces of gold dust. With a satisfied nod he put the poke of dust into his pocket and a few minutes later stepped out into the night.

The sound of drums and dancing came up from the Village as he crossed the dim courtyard toward the light that shone palely from Silvertip's window. As he entered the cabin the Swede, still nursing the broken head that kept him from participating in the Potlatch festivities, groaned dismally in greeting.

There were a few perfunctory words, then for half an hour Kilbuck talked earnestly. Silvertip protested;

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he whined; but he listened. There was mention of Boreland and beach sand; of gold dust and Kon Klayu. After much persuasion Silvertip consented to do what the White Chief outlined.

Kilbuck held out the small bag of gold and the pale-eyed Swede reached for it and put it away under his pillow.

The trader rose to go. As he draped his robe about him, his eye caught a movement among the blankets in the top bunk. He started.

"God, you fool!" he whispered hoarsely, leaning down and grasping Silvertip's arm. "Why didn't you tell me you had some one here. Who is it?"

The Swede groaned. "By yingo, Ay plumb forget about te tam jung yack-ass Harlan. He coom in har dis noon time drunk like hal, wit t'ree bottle of hootch. He tal me he iss lonesome. He iss drunk now, Chief. He can't har not'ing."

Kilbuck drew down the blankets from the head of the man in the upper bunk. The boyish sleeping face was flushed. Dark matted hair clung to the damp forehead and there was a sickening odor of vile liquor in the air. A long moment the trader looked to see if Harlan would open his eyes. Then with a contemptuous laugh he flung the blanket over the lean young face.

"Nothing to fear from him if he drank three bottles of Kayak Bill's brew."

He stepped out of the door into the courtyard, adjusted his headdress and humming a dance-hall ballad, swung down the beach path toward the Indian Village.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OUTFIT

A WEEK later, in the snug little cabin of the *Hoonah*, Ellen Boreland sat opposite a folding table, where her husband, humming contentedly, was adjusting a gold-scale. Ellen's hands were busy with mending but her brow puckered anxiously and her eyes had purple shadows beneath them.

From the moment she had realized the loss of her lock of hair, her conflicting impressions of the White Chief of Katleean had crystallized into a certainty that he meant no good to herself or to her husband. That he desired her she had now no doubt, and while she knew in her heart that she was in no way responsible for this, she felt more keenly than ever that baffling sense of guilt that had attached itself to her since her first meeting with the man. It seemed some loathed feeling shared with the man and more gripping because of words never spoken.

Another thing troubled her: Because of him she had told her husband a lie—the first during her ten years of married life. Her mind went back again and again to the scene. They had come back to their room at the post the night of the Potlatch dance. Jean, full of enthusiasm over the events of the evening came in

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from her loft-room to talk it all over with her sister. Little Loll in a corner, was solemnly practicing the bear-antics of Heart-of-a-Grizzly. Shane Boreland, as was his custom, sat watching his wife comb out the long beautiful tresses that were his pride.

Suddenly he rose from his chair. "By ginger, El!" he exclaimed. "What have you done to your hair? Looks as if you had cut a chunk out of it!" There was concern in his face as he picked up a handful and pointed out the severed portion to his sister-in-law.

Ellen's blood seemed to turn to water. Her heart fluttered in her throat. What explanation could she give this chivalrous, hot-heated Irishman who loved her, and who, she knew from past experience, would shoot a man for less than the Chief had done? She valued above all things the trust and loving companionship that had blessed her married life. She hesitated, desperately seeking some plausible explanation that would approach the truth. . . . Shane, she imagined, was looking at her keenly now and there was a curious light in Jean's frank eyes.

"I—I—cut it, dear," she stammered, hiding her face under the veil of her hair. "I—I cut it to send to mother in the next mail."

The instant the lie was out she would have given a year of her life to recall it. She realized, too late, that it but opened the way for other lies. It placed her in the position of one obliged to carry indefinitely an unexploded bomb, which the least jar might set off causing—who could tell what destruction.

The next day she had insisted with more than her

usual vigor on returning to the schooner. Shane had consented reluctantly, but he would not for the present accede to her wish to leave Katleean. He was stubborn in his determination to learn all that was to be known about the Island of Kon Klayu.

Ellen recalled the events of the week. Her husband's enthusiastic reports of the Island gold. His talks with the carefully non-committal trader and the thin-nosed, shifty-eye Silvertip; and finally his decision to spend the winter on the Island in search of the precious metal. Shane was sitting now at the table pouring some shining dust into a saucer and studying the "colors" as they fell.

"The lure of raw gold, Ellen!" he mused looking up at her with glowing dark eyes. "There's no greater magnet for a man in the world, little fellow—except the love of a woman," he added softly with the smile that had won his wife's heart ten years ago and made her happy in sharing his shifting fortunes.

"But if I make a go of it this trip, Ellen, I give you my word that I'll go back to the States and settle down somewhere,—any place you wish. Look at it—just look at it, El!" He held the saucer so that it caught the sunlight streaming in through the round cabin window. "By Jove, it ought to go eighteen dollars to the ounce! It's clean as a dog's tooth! Silvertip says he and some of his mates panned it one day at Kon Klayu while the *Sophie Sutherland* took on water. . . . Of course the party sent over by Kilbuck's Company didn't find much, but from what I hear they were a hootch-drinking lot who knew nothing of mining, and thought

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only of drawing their pay and keeping drunk. You can see for yourself, Ellen, what this northern hootch does to a man—young Harlan is a good example. Gone to the dogs in three months, though I can't help liking the fellow."

He shifted the gold dust again and bent his head to peer at it through a small microscope. During the moment's silence came the lap of the incoming tide against the hull of the schooner.

"That reminds me, Ellen," Boreland went on. "The Chief received word yesterday from a trading-post down the coast that a revenue cutter is bound this way on a tour of inspection. Kayak Bill's going to hide his still and go into retirement until the cutter has finished investigating. Seems they're always suspecting him of making hootch!" Shane chuckled with amusement. "Funny old devil—Kayak Bill! I like the old cuss. I've asked him to come over to the Island with me for a couple of months until the Chief brings the *Hoonah* with our winter outfit."

At the mention of the *Hoonah* Ellen glanced about the snug, cheerful cabin that had been her home for many adventurous months. This staunch little schooner had brought her and her loved ones safely over hundreds of miles that separated her from her home port. Thoughts came to her now of wild, stormy nights when she had awakened in her reeling bunk to the scream of wind in the rigging, the roar of waves, the tramp of hurried feet overhead and the shouting of voices. At those times she knew Shane stood at the wheel in the drenching rain giving his orders for

the reefing of sails. During the first days of the voyage the awakening in a gale had always filled her with a great fear—a fear not for herself but for her family, her little son. She would clasp the sleeping boy more closely in her arms and lie with straining muscles, waiting listening, every sense painfully alert and her eyes hypnotically watching the garments on the opposite wall swing out and back with the roll of the ship. Gradually as the schooner righted itself after every roll Ellen's nerves would relax. Unclasping her arms, she would snuggle close to the back of the bunk,—the few inches of the *Hoonah's* hull that separated her and her loved ones from the black, bull-throated billows that sought to swallow them. The feel of the cool wood brought a sense of safety, a certainty that with Shane's strong, thin hands on the wheel the *Hoonah* would bring them all safely through any danger of the sea. Then bit by bit approaching sleep would dim the fury of the gale until at last it was but a lullaby zephyr wafting her, like her little son, once more into the harbor of dreams. . . .

She had not realized how dear the schooner had grown to her until she had signed, against her better judgment, the bill-of-sale that transferred the vessel to Paul Kilbuck. On the reef-sown coast of Kon Klayu it appeared there was no harbor where a ship might find shelter, and Shane needed money for his winter outfit. Half the purchase price the trader had paid down—the other half was to be given Boreland when Kilbuck took the remainder of the outfit to Kon Klayu later in the fall.

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Ellen aroused herself from her reverie. Shane had been speaking some minutes and his first words had been lost to her. He was quoting:

"One more trip for the golden treasure
That will last us all our lives!"

Life to Shane was a sweet and wonderful thing. Though there had been years of hardship and struggle and often failure in the mining game, he still retained an eager joy in existence, a faith in men and women and something of the wonder of a boy. Perhaps it was because the place of his questing had ever been the forests, the mountains, the clean, unpeopled places.

His present life of a prospector, sailing his little schooner boldly across dangerous reaches of ocean, through the intricate lovely waterways of Alaska's Inland Sea, poking her prow into hidden crescent coves, trying his luck with a gold-pan on unknown streams, always sure that the next shift of the gravel in the pan would reveal a fortune—all this made life fascinating for Shane Boreland. No matter how far short realization fell, he was always ready with another dream, always eager when a new adventure beckoned.

And now it was the mysterious Island of Kon Klayu.

Stripped of the golden glamour with which Shane had invested it, Ellen knew it to be an island but five miles long and a mile and a half wide, which lay out in the North Pacific ninety miles from the nearest land; an island uninhabited and completely surrounded by dangerous reefs and shoals; shunned by ships and spoken of as a death trap by sailors. But one tree,

other than alder and willow, grew upon it. Three hundred feet above sea-level on the high, flat top, a lone and stunted spruce rose from the tundra and breasted the heavy gales that swept the ocean. For firewood there were but the drift logs of the beach. There were no animals of any kind. The foxes and a pet cub bear taken there by the Alaska Fur and Trading Company at the time of the fox-farm experiment had been killed off by passing whalers who were sometimes forced ashore for water.

Shane had entertained no idea of allowing his wife and family to accompany him to the Island. All his powers of persuasion had been used to induce Ellen to stay at Katleean with her sister and Loll as guests of the White Chief until the fall steamer going south should take them back to the States. The trader, Ellen knew, had taken this arrangement for granted and she was certain she detected something of baffled rage in him when she informed him on her last visit to the shore, that since she could not dissuade her husband from going to the Island of Kon Klayu she and her family would accompany him.

It was in vain the White Chief pointed out to her that there were not provisions enough at the post to supply Shane with a complete winter outfit. He must sail at once for Kon Klayu in order to prepare for the winter's work, and the autumn steamer bringing more supplies was not due for six weeks. It was in vain Kilbuck assured her that he, himself, would take her to the Island later on when he went over with the remainder of Shane's outfit after the arrival of the

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steamer. Ellen was obdurate in her decision and once having committed herself she became a different woman. Whatever misgivings she held in regard to the enterprise she kept to herself. She plunged wholeheartedly into the preparations for the journey, becoming at once the practical director of the commissary. She looked carefully over the stock of goods at the trading-post and obtained far more in the way of supplies than the easy-going Shane, inclined to trust to the trader's judgment, would have done. And Kilbuck, for some reason, seemed disinclined to furnish even as much as his stock would allow.

For the past week Ellen eluded every effort made by the White Chief to see her alone. Since the night of the Potlatch dance she had talked with him only in the presence of a third person. Strange to say she found now that she could look him squarely in the eyes, but when she did so it was as if steel met steel. The feeling that she was playing a game of wits against the autocrat of Katleean was not without its interest for her. It was impossible entirely to conceal her growing hostility toward the man, and she knew that her wordless antagonism was felt by Kilbuck. To her anxiety she knew also that instead of diminishing his appetite for her, it increased it. She was growing eager to be away.

The outfitting went forward daily. Jean and Loll spent many hours ashore exploring the vicinity with Senott or Kayak Bill. Sometimes the visitors caught a glimpse of the tweed-clad young man who seemed so quiet and aloof, and who, even when not drinking,

avoided them all. Ellen observed a certain interest in him growing in Jean. A tentative question or two put to Kayak Bill revealed this, though it availed her nothing. The old hootch-maker, muttering something about "everybody to his own cemetery" had branched off to relate something he had "hearn tell" when he was "a-punchin' o' cows down in Texas."

Ellen, as well as Jean, wondered at the presence in Katleean of such a man as Harlan, and the reason for his connection with the dead Naleenah. Understanding of another's lapses comes with years and Jean, Ellen knew, was too young fully to realize what this young man's dissipation portended.

Ellen kept a sharp eye on Harlan. Though she herself shared Jean's mild curiosity and faint pity, she managed to keep her sister at a safe distance from him. She intended very carefully to guard Jean.

Sometimes, in the evening, when the girl stood on the after-deck of the *Hoonah*, her violin tucked beneath her chin, her eyes on the dreaming radiance of the sunset, Ellen studied her as she played. She wondered, if in her heart, the young girl played to *him*, and if he heard. And once, to her anxiety, as she sat listening to the silvery music floating out over the water, she had caught a shadow moving on the shore—had seen a figure move stealthily down a hidden trail to the Point beyond the Indian Village and lie behind a great boulder, listening. . . .

The outfitting for the Island was nearly complete now. Each of the new acquaintances at Katleean contributed, with friendly intent, to the preparations

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of the departing travelers. In the cabin of young Harlan, which had been the home of the deceased Add'em-up Sam were shelves laden with dusty books, old magazines and piles of ancient newspapers. At Kayak Bill's suggestion the bookkeeper had packed the best of these into a box and the old hootch-maker had borne the package to Jean, remarking that "readin' matter might come in mighty handy on the Island." The box was placed with Shane's outfit stacked in a corner of the store.

Ellen and Jean were looking through the collection one afternoon, judging the departed Sam by his taste in literature, which they found to be surprisingly good. As Jean turned the pages of *Treasure Island*, a paper fluttered to the floor. The girl picked it up, reading aloud the caption over a crude, penciled map: "The Island of Kon Klayu." She unfolded it and was smoothing out the creases that she might better study the drawing when Loll came running in from the platform in front of the store. His freckled face was puckered with suppressed grief, his grey eyes abrim with the tears he was too proud to shed.

"Mother—Jean—look at poor Kobuk," he faltered, with a gulp that threatened to send the drops tumbling over his brown cheeks.

Kobuk, the big huskie, had wagged himself into the hearts of every member of the Boreland family. Ellen knew that Shane had offered the White Chief a good price for the animal, but the trader had refused to part with his lead dog. Even when it was discovered that the huskie had developed mange Kilbuck

would not give him up, though he did nothing to relieve him. Shane, busy with his outfitting, found time to take care of Kobuk, rubbing him every day with a mixture of sulphur, lard and carbolic acid until he was practically cured. Jean and Loll had attended these treatments taking turns holding the bowl of sulphur salve and encouraging the restive Kobuk to be a good dog and take his medicine. Now it was with the utmost pity and concern that they beheld him slinking to his corner in the store, for he had been out on a porcupine hunt and his nose, his entire head was literally bristling with needle-like quills.

Ellen had seen irate dog-owners spend hours with a pair of pinchers removing quills from their animals, and she knew that even one of those tiny needles, if overlooked, could work its way straight through Kobuk's body. If it struck a vital organ, he would die.

The dog eased himself into his corner and tried to rest his head on his paws. The quills under his muzzle stabbed him and he raised it with a sharp yelp of pain. Jean and Buddie sprang toward him with expressions of sympathy and endearment. The dog whimpered, raising his soft, dark eyes to their faces as if begging for help in his trouble. Jean, on the verge of tears, sank down beside him, but Ellen, thinking to relieve him, ran to the living-quarters back of the store to get a pair of pinchers from Decitan.

When she returned she stood a moment half-concealed by the curtain in the doorway. Jean was soothingly stroking one of Kobuk's big paws. Near her stood the White Chief who evidently had just come

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in. Both thumbs were hooked beneath his scarlet belt, and he was looking down at the dog. Kobuk at that moment lowered his head and tried to work himself farther back in his corner, but the effort brought out another yelp of pain.

The man's eyes became mere slits.

"Ah, damn you, so you've done it again, have you?" he said with a softness that in some indefinable way chilled the blood. "Well, this time we'll let the quills work through your brainless skull—or—Here, Hoots-noo—" he turned to the Indian who was entering the store. "Take this cur out and shoot him. I'm tired of having quills yanked out of him."

With a cry of protest Jean came to her feet.

"Oh, no, no! Please!" Apparently forgetful of all but the safety of the dog, the girl clasped both her little hands about the man's arm. Her hazel eyes pleaded. Loll, too, was clinging to the trader's other hand, stroking it and looking up beseechingly into his bearded face.

"Oh, Chief, please, *please* don't shoot Kobuk! We want him! We'll take care of him!"

The White Chief paid no attention to the boy, but he looked down into the face of the girl and laughed unpleasantly.

"The little squaw with white feet can be very nice to me when she wants something," he said. "What are you willing to give me for Kobuk, my little lady?"

At his tone the girl shrank back, but Loll, sturdily refusing to be ignored, interrupted hastily:

"*She* ain't got nothing you want, Chief!" He began

tugging desperately at a string about his waist which bound to him his most cherished possession—an old broken revolver bestowed on him by Kayak Bill. "Here, I'll give you my pistol for Kobuk!" The earnest little fellow held out the weapon with an air of certainty which indicated that there could be no refusal of such a treasure.

The White Chief sat down leisurely on a box of pilot bread as if to better enjoy the situation.

"No, my boy," he said with another laugh. "Your disdainful aunt is going to pay me for Kobuk in coin which you will learn more of bye and bye." He turned to the girl. "I'm not such a bad fellow, Jean," he continued with an attempt at an ingenuous smile. "Come, kiss me once and the dogs is yours."

Over Jean's face swept conflicting emotions, disgust, contempt for the man, pity for the moaning dog whose life depended on her decision. The Indian, stolid and unseeing, had already laid a hand on Kobuk's collar.

Ellen, unable to remain silent longer, started forward unnoticed by the others in the tenseness of the moment, but before she had taken two steps Loll had taken charge of the situation.

Going close he rested a hand on either knee of the trader and looked up earnestly into the man's pale eyes.

"Chief," he spoke half-apologetically as man to man, "you see Jean—" he indicated his aunt with a tilt of his head—"Jean doesn't like to kiss strange men—but *I* don't mind." And before anyone realized what was happening, the boy had taken Kilbuck's face between

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two small hands and pressed cool, childish lips to the man's forehead.

Jean caught her nephew in her arms impulsively. "You darling!" Half laughing, half crying she buried her face in his neck. "You darling!"

"Well, that's settled!" said Loll in his matter of fact tones as he wriggled to free himself. "Kobuk's ours now. Thank you, Chief. I'll have—" He broke off with a shout to welcome Ellen, whom he had just seen. "Hey, mothey! He's ours now. Gimme the pinchers!" He took them from Ellen's hand and started toward the quill-filled Kobuk, who, sensing perhaps a change in his fortunes, had risen expectantly to his feet.

Shane, entering the doorway at that moment, was apprized of the addition to the family. The next two hours were spent by the Borelands in extracting quills from the repentant Kobuk. For the first time in his life, perhaps, the pain-racked animal was soothed and cheered during the hated operation by quaint old Irish terms of endearment, punctuated with advice.

"But there'll be no more porky hunting for you, me lad," Shane assured the dog as he pulled the last quill. "For the very first fine day we have we're off for the Island of Kon Klayu and divil a thing you'll find there to chase but sand fleas!"

CHAPTER IX

HARLAN WAKES UP

GREGG HARLAN had watched with interest the Boreland's preparation for departure to the island of Kon Klayu. For the first time in his life he was doing some serious thinking; and ever since the Potlatch he had been seeing himself in no complimentary light.

His chief source of self-disgust was his way of taking the information that the Borelands, including Jean Wiley, thought him a squaw-man. In his dejection his thoughts went back time and again to those few moments of silent companionship when he had stood beside the girl in the dusk and watched the funeral canoes come in. . . . Why hadn't he, after the White Chief told him of his reputed connection with Naleenah, why hadn't he followed Jean and explained? True, the shock and surprise of the thing had momentarily swept him off his feet, but why had he, in foolish reckless resentment against unjust circumstances, rushed off instead to the cabin of Kayak Bill and taken glass after glass of the stuff that had put him in such a state of oblivion that he was unable to take any part in the Potlatch festivities? Since then he had been too ashamed to approach either of the

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white women. He felt that he must first do something to win their respect.

During his twenty-five years Harlan had been a drifter along the pleasant ways of least resistance. This was, perhaps, because he had never been called upon to shoulder responsibility. Six months before, because of this tendency more than because he had been in love, he had found himself involved in a foolish but unpleasant financial tangle brought about by a plump, perfumed, pleasure-loving little blonde. This small person from an eastern state had made his former knowledge of the hectic night-life of San Francisco seem but a tuning up of the orchestra before the overture. . . . After the inevitable parting of the ways, he had found himself obliged to call upon his irate and disgusted father for financial assistance. He had done this often before—so often that this last episode, more scarlet than any of the others, brought about a crisis. Later, penniless, but debtor to his father only, he had departed under a cloud of paternal disapproval to take the position of bookkeeper at faraway Katleean. It was then that he decided he was through with women.

At the time he believed it, as all men do who make a similar decision, but up here in the North he found that a white woman meant more to men than in the States. After three months in Katleean a white woman had come to stand for the cleanness and the decencies of life. He found himself longing to be near and speak to these two visiting women of his own kind. He had heard of the "woman hunger" of Alaska and recognized in himself the symptoms of that state which

causes even the most hardened misogynist to travel a hundred perilous miles merely to look on a white woman's face and hear her voice.

And music—the music of Jean's violin drew him like a magnet. Every evening when she played on the afterdeck of the *Hoonah* he slipped down to the Point beyond the Indian Village and listened—listened hungrily, with a longing to join her and explain his stupid innocence in connection with the dead Naleenah. His youth called to hers, and he wanted this clean-hearted girl to think well of him.

His drunkenness—but of course there was no excuse for that. He despised weakness in a man, and he had thought a good deal about his own of late. The episode of Naleenah had brought him face to face with the grim realities attending his drifting.

Sometimes when he looked at Silvertip, lolling brutish and drunken on the blankets of his bunk, Harlan had wondered what alcohol did for the squaw-man. Once he had tried to outline to the one-time cook of the *Sophie Sutherland*, the beauties, as *he* saw them, of getting drunk. He recalled now his sensations from the moment the alcohol began creeping through his veins, softly, warmly, creating a glow about his heart. Vistas then opened up before him. Romance and adventure beckoned him. . . . Later, when the stimulant reached the centers of his brain, like the sentient fingers of a musician touching the keyboard of his soul, it produced golden harmonies from those keys whose tones are love, rhythm, color, appreciation of the beautiful: Inhibitions melted away in the amber light

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that enfolded him. Lovely things he had read or seen or thought and kept to himself for lack of expression formed themselves into words of exquisite simplicity that were to his ear as pastel shades to the eye. He could sing then, as he never sang at other times. Music that was felt, rather than heard, swayed him, and his feet, his hands, his whole body longed to dance and interpret this rhythm of the universe.

Afterward came oblivion, a sweet forgetting of all unpleasantness, a divine sense of mingling without responsibility with the elements.

But lately, he admitted reluctantly to himself, even in his moments of keenest alcoholic pleasure, he had been aware of an underthought that his exalted mood must pass leaving him more colorless, more listless, more inclined to drift than before. It took more of Kayak's whisky to produce an effect now than it had in the beginning. Perhaps, in time, he might even grow to be like Silvertip. . . . He shuddered. It sickened and dismayed him to realize how the pale liquor had already enslaved him—to what it might lead him.

Another thing troubled him also. Ever since the night of the Potlatch dance which he had been too intoxicated to attend, something vague but insistent at the back of his consciousness strove to make itself remembered. Something he had heard in a half-drugged sleep. Something about gold and Kon Klayu. An idea persisted that on him depended some grave issue, but strive as he would he could not remember what it was.

Once, as he swam in the dawn below the Point in an effort to clear his cloudy brain, he prolonged his course until he found himself close to the hull of the *Hoonah*. It gave him satisfaction to find that despite three months of heavy drinking at Katleean, his daily plunge in the sea had kept him physically fit. He looked at the trim little schooner cradling her sleeping crew. Green wavelets lapped against the clean white side, and below the water-line the red of the bottom glimmered. Her upcurving prow seemed to urge to sea adventures. He wished he might go with Boreland to spend the winter on the Island of Kon Klayu. But this, he knew, was not possible. He had work to do at Katleean and it was time he was beginning it. And Ellen Boreland—he was not unaware that she disapproved of him and did her best to keep her sister from friendship with him. . . . But—he might make the trip to the island and back to help Silvertip, whom Kilbuck had detailed to pilot the *Hoonah* to Kon Klayu. Silver was not fond of work. He would welcome the extra help in bringing the vessel home again from Kon Klayu. . . . Kon Klayu! The words tantalized him afresh with his failure to remember the thing he should. Perhaps the sight of that mysterious island, though he had never seen it, might bring back to him the memory he sought. . . . He decided suddenly. When the *Hoonah* sailed for the Island of Kon Klayu he would be aboard, even though he had to go as a deck hand!

CHAPTER X

THE PIGEON

A MORNING came favorable for the departure of the *Hoonah*. Sunshine flooded the peaks, the hills, the post of Katleean. A stiff easterly breeze ruffled the bay into pale golden-green, and overhead long, white, scarf-like clouds streaked the blue. "Mares' tails" Kayak Bill called them, as he stood on the beach shifting his sombrero forward over his eyes so that he might better engage himself in what is known in Alaska as "taking a look at the weather," a proceeding which becomes second nature to those who live in the North where travel depends on wind, tide and atmospheric conditions.

The time of saying good-bye was at hand. Silver-tip, with one of his countrymen and Gregg Harlan were already aboard the schooner. The White Chief stood on a driftlog watching Boreland load the last trifles into a whale-boat some hundred yards below him. One hand was hooked beneath the trader's scarlet belt; the other held an unlighted cigarette. The wind ruffling the long dark hair on his bare head gave him a lean and savage look.

Kayak Bill, who had been unusually silent all morn-

ing, left off searching for weather signs, and sauntered over to him. His eyes narrowed slightly as he looked keenly into Kilbuck's face.

"Chief," he said nonchalantly, as he drew his pipe from the pocket of his mackinaw, "you and me's grazed conside'able on the same range. We ain't never got in each other's way. . . . There's some things about you I ain't no nature for a-tall—but you been purty square with me. . . . Likewise I'm not goin' round tellin' all I know about you. Everybody to his own cemetery, I say." The old man took his pipe from his mouth and faced the trader again. "But before I go a-rampin' off on this vacation o' mine, I want to say this, Chief: I'm not knowin' nothin' but hear-say about this Island o' Kon Klayu—but—yars ago I lost out in the matter o' family and I'm thinkin' a heap o' this Boreland outfit now. I'm trustin' to you, Chief, not to ring in no cold deck on 'em—or me. I'm figgerin' on seein' you at the Island o' Kon Klayu in about six weeks with the balance o' the grub."

"You needn't be so all-fired serious about it, Kayak. I'll take care of the grub all right. You say yourself that I've always played fair with you."

"Yas, Chief," drawled the old man, "but they ain't never been no women in the game before. Women and dogs is hell for startin' trouble. I ain't blind, Chief. I can still see offen the end o' my nose."

The trader laughed abruptly.

"Well, old timer, you seem to be seein' off the wrong side this time. Don't you worry, Kayak. I'll be along and get you about the middle of October.

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Your revenue cutter friends will be gone by that time."

Kayak Bill was silent for a moment. Then with seeming irrelevance he said slowly:

"One time . . . a long spell back . . . I knew a woman . . . and a man. He cheated her, and—wall, I shot him dead . . ."

"Hey, there, Kayak!" came Boreland's shout from the whale-boat. "Come lend a hand here a minute, will you?"

Kayak Bill waited a moment. Then shaking the ashes from his pipe he restored it to his pocket and plodded down to the boat.

Farther along the beach a little group of Thlinget women had gathered about Ellen and Jean to bid them good-bye. Senott, self-appointed spokeswoman for her shyer sisters, was shoving forward a plump, good-natured looking squaw, who handed Jean a pair of hair-seal moccasins and a small Indian basket.

"She potlatch you," explained Senott, supplementing her words with eloquent eyes and hands. "She like you, Girl-Who-Make-Singing-Birds-In-Little-Brown-Box. She Add-'m-up Sam 'ooman. She go Kon Klayu long time ago. She sorry you go. No river on dat island. No salmon, no tree, no mans. Only b-i-g wind! B-I-G sea! She sorry you go." The plump widow stood by shaking her head and making soft clucking sounds in her throat.

Leaving Jean to thank their Indian friends Ellen slipped through the circle. Her conventional training evidently asserted itself, for she turned now and went to say a few words of good-bye to their host.

She looked singularly small and attractive as she stood before him, her blue eyes raised to his face, the sea-wind blowing her hair across the pink of her cheeks. The trader stepped down from his log to greet her.

"I wondered if you would say good-bye to me without the presence of your whole family," he said softly, bending his head. Many a squaw in Katleean, after incurring his displeasure, had seen the same expression in his eyes just before he struck her in the face with the flat of his hand. "One might almost think you are afraid of me. But . . . though you will not stay at Katleean, I'll always have something to remind me of you." He slipped a hand into the pocket of his flannel shirt and the sheen of Ellen's stolen lock of hair caught the light for a moment before he buttoned the flap over it again.

Ellen, with a few stammered words, was backing away from him, her wide, fearful gaze fixed on his face, when he reached out, and as if merely to shake her hand in farewell, laid his iron fingers over hers in a grasp that made her wince.

"Just a moment, my frigid little Lucretia." He spoke hurriedly: "I'm letting you go now because the time is coming when you'll want me. When you get aboard the schooner you'll find I have presented your son with a pigeon. Take good care of it. It was hatched here—and it's your only means of communicating with the mainland. And listen—" he leaned down almost whispering the words—"When I want a squaw, I get her. When I want a white woman, I

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get her. Remember the pigeon. You'll want me. The pigeon, loose, comes back. I shall understand!" He laughed, as if sharing with her the humor of some vile joke.

Ellen shrank back, her face flushing with outraged helplessness and shame. She wrenched her hand free.

"All aboard! All aboard for Kon Klayu!" The cheery voice of her husband rang out. She turned from the White Chief and ran.

The natives came forward in a crowd. Jean free-stepping, wind-ruffled, met her halfway, and seizing her hand, the two hurried down to the whale-boat. Friendly native hands shoved the boat off amid shouts of good will and good-bye.

The rattle of the anchor-chain sounded as they boarded the *Hoonah* and made the tow-line of the whale-boat fast to the stern. The sails were hoisted and a moment later the little craft listed slightly as she caught the breeze. The entire population of Kat-leeen waving farewell followed along the beach past the Indian Village and down to the Point.

"Good-bye! Good luck!" shouted the few white men on the shore.

"*Tay-a-wah-cu-sha! Tay-a-wah-cu-sha!*" echoed the plaintive Indian voices.

From the top of the cabin the Borelands waved back as the *Hoonah* rounded the wooded point that shut out even the smoke from the trading-post.

Sea-gulls white as the bellying sails, tilted against the wind in the sunshine. A wedge of wild geese honked high on their way to southern lands. Countless

sea-parrots squattered away from the schooner's path, dragging their fat, black bodies in splashing clumsiness across the water. The wind freshened and the rigging strained and creaked as the *Hoonah* swung to the long, wrinkled swells of the open sea. Driven ahead by the breeze she dipped and splashed sending showers of whitened water away from her prow and leaving a wake of foam-laces behind her like a veil.

Already the adventurers had left behind the creatures of their kind, for Silvertip at the wheel was headed out into the lonely North Pacific, laying his course for the Island of Kon Klayu.



PART II



CHAPTER XI

THE ISLAND OF THE RUBY SANDS

NEXT morning the schooner was rolling easily on a long swell. Through the open hatchway the sun streamed down into the hold where Harlan lay, and as he awoke, the appetizing fragrance of boiling coffee drifted in to him from the cabin in the stern. Above the calls and the sound of feet on deck came a thin wild chorus which he had learned to associate with the island nesting grounds of thousands of sea-birds.

Hastily slipping into his clothes he climbed to the deck and looked about him. The *Hoonah* was riding at anchor—ninety miles out at sea!

The morning air of sea-swept spaces filled his lungs with freshness. On three sides the sun-silvered green of the ocean fairly sang to the eye as it rolled away to meet the far blue of the horizon. Half a mile off the starboard bow, edged by lines of breaking surf, sand-dunes topped with green merged gradually southward, into strange jade-green hills, low and soft as brushed velvet in the distance. To the North the dunes tapered to a long, narrow shoal over which, as far as the eye could reach, swells of clearest emerald broke into a splendor of flying spray.

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Above this sand-spit thousands of gulls flashed, skirling and screeching in the sunlight, their weird, thin calls mingling with the diapason of the surf that boomed against the beach and the hundred reefs of Kon Klayu. Overhead a constant stream of gulls and sea-parrots plied between their fishing grounds and the south end of the island where they had their young.

"By Jove, it's a regular little island paradise?" Harlan called to Kayak Bill. "How comes it that everyone is afraid of such an inviting looking spot?"

Kayak, who was picking his way forward to where Boreland was already busy with the outfit, paused and leaned a moment against the main-mast. His eyes with one slow glance took in land and sea.

"Wall, son, I reckon she's somethin' like a pussycat. She's a-smilin' and a-purrin' in the sun today, but I'm thinkin' when it blows up a sou'easter, with nothin' in God's world a-tween here and Honolulu to stop the sweep o' it, she shows every one o' her reefs like a cat barrin' her claws."

Kayak Bill looked about him once more before striking a match to light his pipe. Then drawling something about the "ox-wee-nee-chal" gales, he passed on to the bow of the schooner, leaving Harlan smiling.

Silvertip and his mate were kneeling in the stern, both busy with the pulley-blocks that held the steering cable of the *Hoonah*. Their low tones did not carry beyond a few feet. Silvertip slanted uneasy glances in the direction of the foaming shoals that ran far out into the sea. His helper, evidently disagreeing with him on some point shook his head. Harlan caught

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something about fog and getting off the course in the night.

At last the man burst out :

"By yingo, I tank we are on wrong side of——"

"Shut up, you tam squarehead," snapped Silvertip, with a glance in Harlan's direction.

The man made a gesture as if he washed his hands of the whole affair, then raised his head to look about him. A dark streak far toward the southern horizon indicated a breeze from that direction.

"I guess we haf a beam wind home," he announced.

"Yas, tank God," assented Silvertip, with a last look at the rudder cable. "Ant as kwicker ve leaf dis de'th trap, as better for me. She blow up gale har in turty minutes. Ven Ay vas cook on *Soofie Suderlant*——"

"Breakfast is ready, men!" interrupted Ellen's clear voice from the cabin hatchway.

The Swedes came to their feet and after a moment of whispered conversation, joined the others in the cabin.

Half an hour later, when Boreland and Silvertip came on deck again, the breeze had freshened slightly and the sailor looked about him in a restless and worried manner, his glance finally lingering on the sand-spit.

"Borelant, Ay tank ve lant you har right away kwick. Ay tank she blow by an' by like hal."

Shane, glancing at the clear sky and the sun-kissed waves, laughed.

"Nonsense, Silver! The island's got you buffaloed, just as it has all the sailors in this section. . . . But

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it's up to you. I'm ready to go ashore any time you say. The sooner you land me and show me our cabin, the better I'll like it."

The whale-boat at the stern of the schooner was drawn alongside, and another which had been carried on the forward deck was lowered.

The first one loaded, Kayak Bill and the two Swedes climbed down into it and shoved off from the side. Boreland and Harlan, loading the second one, stopped in their work to watch them.

Tossing up and down on the long, green swells, the moving boat drew nearer and nearer to the foaming lines of surf. Presently they were in the welter of white. Once when the little craft went completely out of sight behind a monster swell, Loll, watching from the cabin top, shouted in alarm, but yelled again in delight as it rose high on the same billow.

Silvertip and his mate bent to the long oars. In the stern Kayak Bill, hatless and wind-blown, steered wisely over the rollers which threatened to break on them any moment.

In profane admiration Boreland watched. "It's the ninth wave," he shouted presently. "Kayak'll take her in on that one. . . . By thunder!" he broke out as the boat rushed toward the shore in a smother of foam, and landed well up on the beach, "if that old cuss could rope a steer as well as he can land a boat in a surf, I wonder that they ever let him out of Texas!"

The work of landing the outfit went steadily on and with each trip to the beach Silvertip urged more haste. Tides, currents, quick-rising fogs and gales,

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and the extreme danger of the anchorage—these were the burden of his conversation. Since he was the only one in the party who had been on Kon Klayu before they were obliged to accept his reasons without argument.

Despite haste, however, it was late afternoon when the last boat-load went ashore. Turning from his contemplation of it, Gregg Harlan looked down ruefully at the water-blisters that decorated the palms of his slim hands. He was spending the most arduous day of his life. He was tired. Every muscle in his body ached from the heavy work of handling the outfit and in his mind was a weariness slightly tinged with bitterness.

It was not until he saw Ellen and Jean in the departing whale-boat that he realized how much he had counted on the few hours of their companionship aboard the *Hoonah*. With Loll he was on friendly, almost brotherly terms, because of his sincere appreciation of Kobuk and the boy's new pigeon. But as for anything else—he smiled now a little bitterly as he recalled Ellen's polite but wary treatment of him, and the seemingly casual way in which she managed to prevent any interchange of thought between himself and her young sister. He fancied Jean felt this also and resented it, for several times during the day, across the confusion of the deck, her eyes had sought his and in the meeting there was a warming sense of intimacy.

But she was gone now. He would never see her again. He had handed down her violin as she reached

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up from the tossing whale-boat to receive it. He remembered her firm, boyish hand-clasp as she said good-bye to him. Was there regret in her eyes at the separation, or had he imagined it?

Gregg leaned wearily against the cabin looking toward the shore. Everything seemed to have gone wrong for him today. He had intended going in with the last load for an hour's stay on the Island, but Silvertip, fearing that the wind might grow stronger, had insisted on his remaining behind to watch the schooner.

Through the glasses he could see Loll and Kobuk racing up and down the beach now. Jean and her sister sat, somewhat forlornly, he thought, on part of the outfit piled up on the sand. The men had gathered about the whale-boat which was to be left on the Island, and were drawing it up higher on the shingle.

It would be an hour or more before the Swedes returned to the *Hoonah*. Gregg looked out across the rolling, endless ocean. Although the sun was yet shining brightly there was a feeling of evening coming on. The cries of the gulls seemed to have taken on a tone of infinite sadness. All at once, for some inexplicable reason, he was overwhelmed by a sense of the futility of life—of living. No quest seemed worth pursuing. No dream worth dreaming. He had often felt this way during the past three months, and when he did—he drank. He longed, with sudden intensity, for a bottle of Kayak's clear, white brew. Alcohol was the magic brush that transformed the monotone of life into shades of wondrous hue.

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His dejection was deepened by the fact that ever since leaving Katleean he had been trying vainly to recall that thing he should remember. While he strained and sweated over the loading of the outfit, his mind had been busy seeking, searching, trying to pierce the curtain of oblivion that separated him from that subliminal self who knew the thing he wanted. He felt as though he were being tantalized. It was almost the same feeling he remembered having in boyish dreams that came during examination time, when the answers to dream questions flashed in his mind for a moment then diabolically faded before he got them down on paper.

After a while his unseeing eyes left the water. He gingerly felt the blisters on his hands and shook his head with a half-contemptuous, half-humorous smile at himself. Then restlessly he began to pace the deck. If only he had something stinging—something stimulating to drink! But the White Chief had seen to it that there was nothing intoxicating aboard the *Hoonah*. It would be eighteen hours at least before he could hope to be in Katleean where Kayak Bill had left a generous supply of hootch stowed away in the top bunk of his cabin. In the top bunk——

He stopped short. From some remote corner of his brain there had come to him one of those inexplicable flashes of memory that revealed, unbidden, the thing he had struggled so hard to remember! In a moment he was back in Silvertip's top bunk the night of the Potlatch dance. The voice of the White Chief came back arguing, commanding, threatening. The whine

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of Silvertip protested, and finally assented. As a realization of what this conversation portended dawned on Gregg, his blistered hands clenched. Cur's! Cowards! to lend themselves to such a work of deception! . . . The aroused young man tossed back his wind-ruffled hair and squared his shoulders. He must reach Boreland immediately; must tell him what he knew before the Swedes left the beach of Kon Klayu.

He sprang to the starboard side of the schooner and trained the glasses on the shore. The men were gathered about the whale-boat talking. He could see Silvertip's hand emphasizing some statement as he pointed to the hills. Gregg knew that once the Swede left the beach, he would never return to it. He had landed his party and his work was done.

Desperately Harlan longed for some kind of craft in which he might reach the shore before the sailors left it. There was none. For a moment he considered waiting until they came aboard. But could he, single handed, force them to return for the Borelands? . . . No, the outcome of such a course was too uncertain. Something must be done at once.

There was only one other way in which he could get word to the adventurers. His eye measured the heaving, foam-streaked distance between him and the beach. Could he make it? A year ago in the States, before drink had gotten such a hold on him, that half mile would have meant nothing to him—but now . . . Temperature, unknown currents, undertows must be reckoned with here. Again, shaking him with its intensity, returned the intolerable craving for a drink.

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His eyes once more swept the long line of breakers. If he would warn the Borelands he must do it at once! He must make that half mile before Silvertip left the beach. . . . He *would* do it!

Even as he decided he had torn open the front of his shirt. Swiftly he stripped to his underwear and the next instant had dived over the side of the schooner.

He came sputtering to the surface. Contrary to expectations the water was much warmer than that at Katleean. With a feeling of relief he struck out for the beach.

He had not gone thirty yards when he became aware that a strong current was carrying him toward the south end of the Island. Desperately he put every ounce of his strength into his shoreward strokes. The buffeting of the running chop sea began to tire him. He was becoming winded. He was losing his sense of direction. After ten minutes he realized, with alarm, that he could never make a landing, near Boreland's outfit. . . . Five minutes more and he knew he would be lucky if he made any landing at all. . . . The current was sweeping him on toward the cliffs at the south end of Kon Klayu where black reefs bared their fangs in a welter of foam. Even in the smother of the chop he was aware of the increased roaring of the breakers.

He made one mighty, but ineffectual effort to reach the shore, then with a feeling of baffled despair he turned his back on the breaking surf and began to fight his way, inch by inch, back to the safety of the *Hoonah*.

CHAPTER XII

THE LANDING

ON the beach the last sack and box had been carried up to a place selected by Silvertip as being above the high-tide line.

"Well, old man, I think we'll take a stroll around and see where that cabin is located," said Boreland cheerfully. "It can't be far from the anchorage here."

"No, no. Youst a little vay. Youst a little vay," hurriedly answered Silvertip as he waved an indefinite hand across the dunes. "You'll find it so easy you don't need me. Ay tank she makes a big vind in the sout'vest, so Ay go before a heavy sea coomes."

They talked about the island anchorage for a few minutes. Boreland insisted that the breeze would die down at sunset as is often the case during good weather, but Silvertip persisted in his determination to get away from the Island at once.

Finally Shane turned to Kayak Bill with a somewhat contemptuous laugh.

"What do you say, Kayak? This fellow seems scared to death to stay here any longer. I reckon we can get along without him now, don't you?"

Kayak Bill spat meditatively at a knot of brown kelp.

"Wall, we *mout* be a-makin' a false play, but—durn the critter anyway, Shane! He ain't got no more backbone than a wet string! He's been in a hell of a stew ever since we got here about this storm a-brewing and it's beginnin' to roil me just havin' him pesticate around. Let him go."

During the conversation Silvertip's pale eyes had been shifting back and forth between Boreland and Kayak. If he resented Kayak's disparaging remarks he made no sign. When the old man finished he began moving swiftly toward the whale-boat where his mate was adjusting the oar-locks.

Five minutes after a last hurried direction relating to the location of the house, he and his partner were making their way out over the breakers to the *Hoonah*. Shane and Kayak started out at once to look for the cabin in which they intended to sleep that night. As they left they called cheerily to the women standing on the beach, but Ellen hardly heard them.

As the distance between the shore and the moving whale-boat lengthened she felt a growing depression, a sinking of the heart. She was filled with a vast loneliness. All about her and above her was illimitable distance—ocean spaces green and rolling; sky spaces far and wide and blue; spaces through which the winds of the world swept unhindered; spaces filled eternally with the sound of the sea. She was awed and silenced by the immensity, the impersonality of it all.

Jean, too, was silent and meditative. Ellen wondered if she were thinking of young Harlan. That problem at least was solved, she thought with relief.

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The girl came close and placed an arm about Ellen's waist as if for the comfort her physical presence might bring.

Together they looked on while the *Hoonah* got under weigh. Flying before the wind it grew smaller and smaller in the distance. The awe in Ellen's heart gradually gave place to an acute homesickness for the comfort of the little craft that would be her home no more. Time passed, and as she watched the topmast sail going down on the horizon she realized, as never before, that the fate of herself and her family was dependent solely on the White Chief of Katleean. His word was law, his power absolute. She was aghast at her blindness in permitting the shaping of such a situation. Blaming herself, she went over the events of the last two weeks step by step, perceiving too late what she would have done, what she should have said to dissuade her husband from this last mad venture.

She turned her eyes from the sea at last, resolving to shake off her depression. She must prepare to meet the future. Jean had left her some time before and was busy tucking her violin away more securely in its wrapping of silk. Lollie kneeling before the cage in which his pigeon fluttered experimentally was trying to force bunches of wild peas through the bars. Ellen went close to the cage and looked down at the bird.

There was something sinister in the gleam of the bright, beady eye it turned up at her. The words of the White Chief came back to her. "You'll want me. . . . The pigeon loose, comes back. *I will under-*

stand." . . . "You'll want me." What had he meant by that? The pigeon—She looked down at it again thoughtfully. That afternoon, in lowering the cage from the deck of the *Hoonah* into the whale-boat, the fastening had slipped and it had fallen into the sea, but Silvertip, by a quick movement, had grasped it before it sank. Suddenly Ellen found herself beset by two conflicting emotions—one moment she wished it had gone down into the depths—the next she felt that she must let nothing happen to this last, this only connecting link with the mainland.

She was brought back to her surroundings by Jean's call, as the young girl hailed Shane and Kayak Bill, who were coming toward them through the tall rice-grass. The faces of both men wore looks of unusual seriousness and there was no answer to Jean's greeting until they stopped beside the piled-up outfit.

"Oh, Shane, you didn't find the cabin?" Even as she asked the question Ellen knew the answer.

"No, dear. It doesn't seem to be at this end of the Island at all. But—" noting the dismayed faces of those about him—"we needn't worry about it. We'll put up the tents here for the night and make an early start in the morning."

Loll had left his pigeon, and was listening, wide-eyed and serious.

"But what if there is no cabin, dad?" With child-like directness he voiced the question that was uppermost in the minds of every other member of the party on the tree-less Island of Kon Klayu. In the momentary silence that followed a gust of wind stirred

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the rice-grass into questioning sound as the coarse blades swayed together.

"Oh, I know!" the boy answered himself enthusiastically, "we'll find a cave, of course, and live in it like Robinson Crusoe."

"Right-o, boy!" Boreland assented with a cheerfulness that did not escape being forced. "But just now we'll get busy making camp for the night."

Two tents were pitched in the rice-grass at the edge of the beach. On a foundation of stones was set the small rectangular sheet-iron stove that every gold-trail in Alaska knows. Within the hour the shiny new pipe was carrying a gay plume of smoke, and with the cheery crackling of the flames, the spirits of everyone rose; for the adventurer may wander where he will, but when he builds a fire—whether it be of coconut husks on the rim of a South Sea atoll, or of drift-wood on the beach of a northern sea, there comes a sense of home and comfort.

Boreland, unpacking what he called the "grub-box," volunteered to get supper for the hungry band while they went in search of more driftwood for the fire. Leaving him busy with the frying-pan they headed northward toward the long sand-spit that pointed like an accusing finger in the direction of the mainland ninety miles away. Above the high-tide line the sand dunes were as powdery blue with lupine as the April fields of California, and Loll's whooping investigation revealed patches of wild strawberries larger than those found at Katleeen, where acres of them grow on the low sand hills along the sea.

Jean and Lollie lay flat on their stomachs filling their mouths and grass-lined hats. The bouquet of sun-warmed strawberries and the perfume of flowering lupine were wafted across the dunes in intermittent gusts of fragrance. Ellen almost forgot her anxiety as she picked the red-toned fruit and listened to the drawling voice of Kayak Bill describing a cordial he had once made from the berries—a liqueur so subtle in its effects, so delicious and so warming that it had melted even the heart of a revenue officer sent up from Sitka especially to investigate him.

Later when they returned to the tents with lupine-laden arms and hats full of berries, there was in the air the good camp smell of frying-bacon, warmed-over brown beans and bubbling coffee. Boreland, apparently in the best of spirits, was setting out the dishes on a clean piece of canvas spread on the sand.

"Get a move on, gang!" he called. "Come and get it! My stomach's fairly cleaving to my backbone!"

As the adventurers ate, the sun, going down on the other side of the island, tinted the sky with shades of wild rose and forget-me-not. A cluster of tiny golden clouds floated high in the blue. As the trembling pearl of twilight came on, an occasional belated gull flew overhead with a single, gently-sad question. The wind died away and the song of the surf mellowed to a croon.

After the dishes were done Ellen and Jean put Lollie to bed in the blankets spread in the larger tent while Boreland and Kayak Bill, smoking and discussing the possibilities of the sands of Kon Klayu, squatted

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about the drift-wood fire. Presently Jean left her sister and stepped out into the gloaming. She turned toward the south and walked along the edge of the sea-drift. The smooth hard beach was a lure to her feet.

She lifted her chin, breathing deeply and swinging her arms free as she walked. The air was faintly cool with the smell of the sea and with it mingled the multi-scented breath of northern Indian summer: lupine, sundried sand, beach grass and celery bloom. Soft and dim and strangely lovely dreamed this Island of the ruby sands. From a shadowy grove of alders inland came the three plaintive notes of a sleepy golden-crown sparrow voicing the beauty, the mystery, the gentleness of the North. Enchantment broods in the twilight of Alaskan nights. Jean had felt it many times during the summer, and loved it—the vague, wild sense of romance in its dusks. Tonight the thrill and promise of life seemed more poignantly sweet than ever before. She longed suddenly for some one to share this hour with her. . . .

Reluctantly, at last she turned from the dim beckoning distance, and retraced her steps.

As she neared camp, Kobuk, yawning, rose from his post by Ellen's tent, to greet her. Boreland and Kayak Bill had gone to bed in the smaller tent, and about the greying embers of their bonfire, rubber boots stood, like grotesque plants, each one drying upside down over a stake driven into the sand.

Jean undressed and slipped between the blankets beside her sister. . . . The clean, fresh smell of

trampled rice-grass drifted about her pillow. . . . As the tide came in the murmur of surf on the distant shoals was soothing as a cradle song, and the girl, with a tired sigh, adjusted her body to the unyielding, sandy bed, and drowsed off into slumber, unaware of the peril that was even then creeping nearer and nearer to the sleepers on the beach of Kon Klayu.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CABIN

IT was long past midnight when Jean was startled into wakefulness. Kobuk was barking with the queer, short woofs of the huskie, and outside the tent Ellen's voice fraught with fear and anxiety, was calling:

"Shane! O, Shane! Wake up! Quick!"

There was a stealthy sound as of lapping water close at hand; then Boreland's shout:

"For God's sake, Kayak, get up!"

Jean, now fully awake, ran out into the grey that precedes the dawn. There was not a breath of wind, and the sea, glassy and as grey as the sky above, was smoother than she ever saw it afterward on Kon Klayu. There was something sinister in the gently heaving stillness of the vast body of water, for not ten feet from the flap of the tent tiny ripples of the incoming tide were swallowing at the dry sand with sibilant softness. One end of the pile of provisions just below the tent was already a foot deep in the advancing flood.

There was no thought of dressing. The race with the sea began at once. No one knew when the tide

would be full, but each realized that should the provisions be ruined or swept away by the water, slow starvation would terminate the quest for the gold of Kon Klayu. Every moment counted. Every hand must help.

Grim-faced and silent, Boreland and Kayak Bill drew on their tremendous reserve power, and during the next few hours performed almost super-human feats of strength and endurance in transferring the provisions to safety. Ellen and Jean, regardless of unbound hair and thin night-robcs, dashed out time after time into the ever rising tide to snatch up sacks of flour or boxes of canned goods, running with them far above the beachline. In the face of the threatened catastrophe they were hardly aware of wet or cold or the weight of objects. They were small women, but in the peril of the moment they carried back-breaking loads that would ordinarily have taxed the muscles of a strong man. Even Lollie, after the first look of sleepy wonder, became alive to the situation when he saw his new pet, the pigeon, clutching the top of its cage above six inches of water. He rescued the bird and while the others were busy with the outfit, rolled up the blankets one by one, and carried them beyond danger. Before he had finished, the relentless tide had crept up about the stove, the box where all the cooking utensils had been placed, and the four rubber boots drying on their stakes. The little fellow, looking absurdly babylike in his nightgown, for all his eight years, splashed out to rescue the threatened articles. Later, at a word from his father, he gathered some

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high-thrown drift-wood to make the fire, by that time sorely needed by all.

The sun was coming up radiantly over the edge of the ocean when they finished their labors. Though nothing had been carried away, the tide had risen two feet after discovery, and a third of the provisions was wet. Silvertip, in his haste to get away from the Island had landed them on the tide lands. As they afterward learned but one or two tides a month reached that particular level, but the Borelands had encountered one of them. Had there been any sea on whatever that night everything would have been swept away, leaving them destitute, even if they had escaped with their lives.

The sun and a good, hot breakfast warmed and cheered everybody. Besides there was little time to discuss their escape, since every wet dunnage bag and box had to be unpacked and the contents spread out in the sun to dry.

In making her round of the salvage, Jean came upon the box containing the old magazines and books from the collection of Add-'em-up Sam. It had been wetted on one end. Taking out the top layer of books she paused over the tattered volume of *Treasure Island* to put into place a crumpled paper which protruded from beneath the cover. To her interest she found it to be the crude drawing of Kon Klayu which she had hastily thrust back that afternoon at Katleean when the quill-filled Kobuk had come cowering to her feet in the store.

"Shane," she called, waving it in front of her, "here's

a little map of Kon Klayu. Maybe you might find out about the cabin from this."

Boreland strode over to her and glanced at the paper. Then he took it in his own hands and scanned it more closely, looking up at the landscape, the sea, and the shoals off which they were camped.

Suddenly his hand fell to his side, and with a great oath he began to pace up and down the sand.

The others, dismayed, gathered about him.

"Why, Shane! What is the matter?" cried Ellen.

"Matter!" Anger flared in his brown eyes and his hand closed on the map as if it had been the throat of an enemy. "Ellen, Silvertip lied! That pale-eyed son of a sea-cook has landed us on the wrong side of the Island. He was too much of a coward to take the *Hoonah* around the shoals. Look at this, Kayak—" He smoothed out the paper so that his partner could see the lines. "According to this, the cabin is all of three miles from here on the other side."

Kayak Bill took the map in his hands and held it for a long moment before his near-sighted eyes.

"By . . . hell!" The words came slowly in a sort of whispered shout.

Then as if unable to declare himself in the presence of the women, Kayak, with a suspicion of haste in his going, sauntered off to the far side of a sand-dune, where he sat down and in the manner of the true Alaskan, drew heavily on his stock of profanity to express his opinion of all Swedes, Silvertip in particular, the country, and the blind Providence that could create an island without a harbor.

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The situation forced upon the party was a serious one. It involved transferring the entire outfit three miles to the cabin—if there was one—over the soft beach sand that made their only means of transportation, a wheelbarrow, utterly useless. There were but a few days during the year when a small boat, such as the whale-boat, could safely circumnavigate the shoals at the north end and the reef-sown waters about the Island. Since this means could not be relied upon, the two men were confronted with the necessity of packing on their backs to the cabin every pound of provisions; and with the equinoctial storms close at hand, every day counted.

Boreland bit his lip in the effort to control the anger that burned within him as he realized that a month or six weeks must be spent in transferring the provisions. But there was no time to lose in cursing the absent Silvertip; immediate action counted and he was never one to let misfortune weigh long upon him.

Noting the worried look on Ellen's face he crossed over to where she sat upon the opened box of books, and put his arms about her.

"Never mind, little fellow. We'll come out all right. The darkest hour always comes before the dawn," he said, laying his rough cheek against her hair.

Despite her anxiety, a smile stirred the corner of Ellen's mouth as she heard this familiar bit of sentimental philosophy. During the ten years of her married life Shane had always been ready with these words, no matter what crushing calamity came upon them.

She patted his hand as she would have patted that of a child.

Loll, with his fingers under Kobuk's collar, had been looking on, his little face unconsciously assuming the seriousness of those about him. He turned now to greet Kayak Bill, who, apparently calmed and refreshed, was wading out of the rice-grass. The old man's sombrero was cocked at a militant angle; his long raw-hide laces snaked along behind his boots, and clouds of tobacco smoke enveloped him.

"Well," he said gently, "I reckon there ain't no useless good vocabulatin' about that varmint, Silvertip. I should a-known better'n to trust a man o' his moth-eaten morals, anyhow."

Ellen stooped down to pick up the map which had fallen unheeded to the sand. For a moment she traced the beachline with her forefinger, reading the penciled names from the paper. "Sunset Point. Skeleton Rib. . . . Well, at least we know where to look for the cabin, Shane." She looked up decisively. "Let's find it before anything else happens to us."

Ten minutes later the two men had disappeared behind the western sand-dunes, and as if to assure them of his confidence in the future, Boreland's voice, raised: a quavering Irish melody floated back to the camp where Ellen and Jean were spreading the blankets upon the sand. They were weary from their night's work. With Kobuk on guard they curled up beside Lollie, and lulled by the far-away calls of the gulls and the ceaseless chant of the sea, were soon fast asleep. . . .

The hoo-hooing of Boreland and Kayak Bill two

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hours later awakened the sleepers before the men reached camp.

"Everything is lovely and the goose hangs high!" Boreland cheerily answered their questions. "We found the cabin all right and tonight we all sleep in our own little wickie!"

The pale-green combers that were breaking for miles out on the shoals, made it impossible to think of using the whale-boat. Therefore, immediately after lunch, the party started on the three-mile walk, each one carrying a pack. Jean, with her violin and a scarlet blanket strapped across her strong young shoulders, stopped in the trail again and again to laugh at her smaller sister, nearly obliterated under two feather pillows. Loll, important as the head packer of a Government party, carried a pot of cold beans in his hand, and encouraged Kobuk, whose pack-saddle was filled with necessary odds and ends for the night's camp. The sheet-iron stove, with food and cooking utensils inside, made a noisy, rattling pack on Boreland's back, leaving his hands free for his shot-gun which he carried for the ducks that were flying south. Kayak Bill shouldered a roll of blankets with an ease which many a younger man might have envied. He was balancing the broom across his palm when his eye fell on the pigeon. He picked up the cage with his free hand.

"Beats all get-out what women will get a man into."

A quizzical smile crinkled the corners of his eyes as he "hefted" his burdens. "Here's an old sourdough like me hittin' the trail with a broom in one fist and—by he—hen, a dicky-bird in the other!" Occasionally

it appeared to dawn on Kayak that his expletives were not exactly suited to the ears of women and children and he seemed to be doing his best to modify them.

Boreland, whistling, led the way. Despite the discouraging events of the night and morning it was a cheerful little party that started out for the cabin. It is only in civilization that trouble and calamity eat into the heart. The wonder of the wilderness lies in that sense of adventure just ahead, which brings forgetfulness of the hardships left behind.

Shane and Kayak tramped down a trail across the sand-dunes, through patches of purple wild peas, and tall rice-grass whose silver-green heads nodded heavily against the travelers as they passed. Wind, spiced with sea-weed and flowers blew across their faces. They came out on the west side of Kon Klayu in a field of blossoming lupine that sloped gently downward to the sands, and beyond, the sea dashed in foam-shot emerald against a ragged reef.

Loll's flower-loving soul looked out of his eyes an instant; then with a shout he abandoned Kobuk and the bean-pot for the moment, and scattering the red-vested bumble-bees that were avidly working for honey in the lupine flowers he began gathering a bouquet for his mother.

The warm August sun coaxed tiny whiffs of vapor from the long grey beach that curved southward toward a distant bluff. Sky and water met far out on the rim of the world.

Scampering ahead along the wave-washed margin, Loll excited Kobuk to laughter-provoking antics, as

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the dog, trying to play with him, swung along with his ungainly pack. The boy made frequent dashes up to the high-tide line, where Indian celery lifted creamy, umbrella-like blooms. From the beach-line the vivid green of the tundra, patterned with daisies, stretched away to meet the alder trees growing thickly where the land gradually rose toward the center of the island. A small lake here and there reflected the sky.

It was in one of these lakes close to the beach that a flock of mallards alighted, passing so near that the travelers could see the iridescent green of the drakes' heads catching the sun. Boreland slipped off his pack and creeping toward the lake, disappeared in the Indian celery.

There was a moment of breathless waiting; a loud report: and a squattering and whirring as the flock flew away toward the hill. Then Boreland, wet to the knees but grinning, appeared holding aloft three birds. . . .

The tide had been coming in for some time, assaulting the shore with ever nearing combers. As the party neared the bluff round which they must pass, the wash of extra large breakers licked the base and in the wake of each receding wave the wet sand mirrored the steep, rocky wall above it. At such times it was necessary to wait until a wave had run out before they could hurry to a place of safety farther on.

"I ain't no nature for this place a-tall," said Kayak Bill, when they had safely dashed over the two hundred feet of this sort of going. "There'd be hell a-poppin' if a fella'd get caught there in a high tide."

"The cabin lies just beyond," Boreland announced.

The bluff sloped down to a tall bank topped with green, having a beach below it.

Following the sands for a short distance, they turned into what had once been a trail. The party halted looking upward to the place that was to be their home.

A mere thread of a footpath, almost blotted out by tall grasses, led gently up the slope for sixty yards to where, above a natural hedge of celery blooms, a little cabin of weather-beaten drift-logs cuddled at the foot of a steep, green hill. A porch jutted out in front, spindling uprights supporting the slanting roof. To the right, farther down and half hidden in the grass, lay the remains of a board shack which had fallen in. There was a sound of trickling water in some hidden place. The sun fell warmly in this sheltered nook, bringing out the scent of green things; and over all was that melancholy stillness which envelopes human dwellings long deserted.

The boom of breakers far out on the reefs was hushed to a soothing hum, and faintly, from the reedy little lake farther down on the southward slope came the quacking of wild ducks. To the north and south and west lay the open sea, and as far as the eye could reach was no sight of land.

Jean broke her wide-eyed silence with a whisper:

"It's under a spell, Ellen, sure as you live." . . . She continued aloud: "Look at that quaint old latch on the door—made of a piece of drift-wood. And see the—Oh! *Shane!*" Incredulity and fear shrilled in her voice—"Shane! Why, it's *moving!*" She grasped her

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brother-in-law's arm as she pointed to the door of the cabin.

It was true. The door was opening slowly, jerkily, in a way that hinted of fearsome, because unknown things. The next instant there stepped out of the opening a tall, shock-haired young man, naked, except for some tatters of an undershirt and a piece of old canvas wound about his hips after the fashion of a South Sea *pareu*.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CASTAWAY

KAYAK BILL was the first to find voice.

"By the roarin' Jasus,"—his tones trembled with enormous astonishment—"if it ain't young Harlan!"

"My God, Gregg, has anything happened to the schooner?" shouted Boreland, his long stride covering the distance to the porch.

"Not a thing that I know of, Skipper." The young man, with a weary gesture, brushed the hair back from his forehead upon which blood from a slight wound had dried. "But you see I left her before she started back to Katleean." In answer to the quick questioning in the five pairs of eyes raised to his he stammered: "I—I—wanted to come—ashore—for a few minutes, and—I—I—the current carried me onto the reefs at the south end, and—I wandered in here a little while ago."

Bruises and deep scratches marred the whiteness of his slim body, and bore evidence of a desperate struggle with the sea and rocks. He was the last person in the world that Ellen would have chosen to be thus romantically cast up on the shores of Kon Klayu with them, but woman is potentially a mother and even her heart

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was touched by his plight. For Harlan, trying—and failing—to appear nonchalant and at ease in his embarrassing situation was boyishly appealing.

“Why, Shane, then the poor fellow hasn’t had a bite to eat since yesterday,” she exclaimed practically, while preparing to divest herself of her pack. “Everybody get busy here and we’ll get him some lunch. Shane, you and Kayak see what you can spare in the way of clothes, and in the meantime, Mr. Harlan—” her conventionally polite tone as she turned to that young man caused Boreland and Kayak Bill to exchange an amused wink—“you may take this blanket that Jean has wrapped about her violin, and put it around you.”

A few minutes later Kayak Bill filled the coffee pot from a small crystal spring that trickled from the hillside into a sunken, moss-grown barrel, and placed it over a bonfire Boreland had made. Ellen left the old man to prepare lunch for their unexpected guest, and followed Jean and Lollie into the cabin that was to be their home.

As she crossed the threshold the close, musty odor of decay smote her unpleasantly. The room had one tiny cobwebbed window through which the north light filtered. In the center a rough, home-made table, with one leg slanting inward, supported some battered cooking utensils now green with a fungus-like mould and disagreeably reminiscent of the Indian hunters who had last camped in the place, no one knew how long ago. In the corner where a stove had once stood, was a pile of damp soot and ashes, and the floor was littered with decaying woolen socks, old papers and rubber

boots from which the tops had been cut to make a house-shoe known to Alaskan miners as "stags." Here and there daylight showed between the uncovered log walls, and great cobwebs wavered in dusty festoons from the chinking of brown peat. An infirm ladder leaned against one side of the room evidently for the purpose of mounting to the loft indicated by the black opening that yawned in the ceiling.

Ellen had no inclination to follow her sister into the little room that opened off the right. She was appalled at the amount of work to be done before the musty squalor of the place could be banished and the cabin made really habitable. For a moment she even considered the possibility of living in the tents until the White Chief brought the winter provisions, by which time she hoped she might be able to persuade her husband to leave the Island.

Boreland, coming into the room with the broom on his shoulder, interrupted her gloomy thoughts.

"Pretty snug little place, eh, El?" he said cheerfully, looking about him and lunging for the nearest cobweb with his broom. "The roof is good and when we get another window here facing the sea, and fix her up a bit, we'll be cozy as bears in a cave."

He filled his pipe, still warm from the last smoke, and lighted it. Going to the opening leading to the next room he called: "Clear out now, young ones. I'm going to start things going in here pretty pronto!"

Through the open cabin doorway Ellen could see Harlan sitting by the bonfire in a borrowed undershirt and the scarlet blanket. He seemed refreshed and

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strengthened by his lunch and was telling Kayak Bill of his failure to swim back to the *Hoonah*, and his subsequent landing on the south end of the Island. Though all but exhausted by his battle with the waves he had managed to dig himself into the dry, sun-warmed sand, and had slept heavily for hours. When he awoke the position of the sun told him that it must be morning. After washing the blood and sand from his scratches, he had set out to find the camp of the Borelands.

Harlan did not give any reason for his apparently senseless determination to swim ashore at the last moment, nor was any expected. On the frontier it is actions, not the reasons for them that are of moment. At the risk of appearing a fool Harlan kept silent on the subject. If he told now what he had heard of Kon Klayu that night he had lain in the top bunk at Silvertip's, there would be nothing for the Borelands to work for, nothing to hope for, during the time that must elapse before the *Hoonah* returned with the winter stores. The truth now would only arouse bitter thoughts of revenge in the heart of Boreland, who must chafe inwardly at his helplessness. There was time enough for the truth when the schooner returned to Kon Klayu.

"Over there on the east side of the Island, almost directly opposite to this point, I think, I found a sort of Eskimo hut made of whale ribs and peat and drift," Harlan was saying as Ellen came out of the cabin. "It isn't half bad, and with a little work I can make it fit to live in."

The young man saw Ellen and came to his feet. "I honestly don't know how to excuse myself for being here, Mrs. Boreland,"—there was a hint of wistfulness in the deep dark eyes he bent upon her—"but—I *am* here and dependent on your generosity until the schooner comes back. I'll try to be as little of a bother as I can. I was just telling Kayak about the hut I found on the other side of the Island. I'll live there."

Ellen's mind had already been busy with the problem of housing her unwelcome guest. She had not been blind to the interested and welcoming look Jean had given the young man as she greeted him half an hour before. She was aware of the almost inevitable result of propinquity. She looked up now with relieved interest and despite herself, with faintly quickening approval. By living on the other side of the Island, Harlan would in part solve the problem. She could then see to it that he saw little of Jean. If it were not for her sister, she might find it in her to like, though she could never approve of the good-looking young ne'er-do-well. Through Kayak Bill she had come to know part of the truth about the death of Naleenah, but like most good women, she could not bring herself fully to exonerate one who had been so compromised. Potentially, if not actually, Gregg Harlan was to her a squaw-man, and most certainly he was a drunkard.

"Well, Lady, me and him's goin' down to the North end of the Island for another load o' grub and camp gear," drawled Kayak Bill as he finished scouring out a burned place in the frying pan. "You can't tell a speck about how long this here weather's goin' to last

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and we want to get under cover soon as possible. Besides—" the old man's eyes twinkled—"Gregg here looks too durned lady-like in this la-de-dah outfit." He pointed to the scarlet blanket. "What he needs is a pair o' pants. Pants, I claim, has a powerful civilizin' and upliftin' influence on the mind o' man. Take the heathen now. They don't wear none, and see what——"

Kayak's threatened monologue was cut short by Boreland, who, having attacked the dirt and débris in the cabin appeared now and began to pile some of it on the fire.

After the old man and Harlan had gone, Boreland swept down the cobwebs and made the cabin ready for scrubbing. That sense of satisfaction and happiness which comes to those in the process of home-making in the wilderness, found expression in his rollicking Irish melody.

The legless Yukon stove was set up after the fashion of the country—an old packing box, found at the cabin, being filled with gravel and the stove put on top of it. A few minutes later there was a crackling fire of drift-wood and every pot and kettle brought from the camp that morning was full of heating water.

The floor of smooth boards, was unbelievably dirty. The lack of soap at first caused Ellen to despair of ever getting it clean, but Loll, who had watched Senott at Katleean cleaning her house, solved the problem by pouring sand on it while Boreland scrubbed with the broom.

Two hours later the clean bare floor was drying rapidly from the heat of the stove before which Ellen

stood stirring a savory pot of duck mulligan for an early supper. . . .

It was late afternoon when Kayak and Harlan returned with their loads. As they turned in from the beach to the little grass-grown trail, Kayak stood a moment looking up at the silver smoke floating against the green hill. Jean, more starry-eyed than usual, was singing as she arranged the dishes on a canvas spread upon the floor of the porch, and at her direction Lollie was painstakingly placing some wild flowers in a tin can for a centerpiece. The two looked up to wave a welcome to the packers as they approached.

"By hell," said Kayak with slow appreciation, "it beats all creation how quick women folks can make a home out o' nothin'." . . .

After supper the men sat on the porch smoking and discussing ways of transferring the provisions from the north end of the Island.

"If we ever get a day calm enough so that we can use the whale-boat," said Boreland, "it won't take long to get the whole business down here. But we can't depend on that. I don't think the sea will get smooth enough this fall for us to bring the boat around the North Shoals. We'd better skid it across to this side of the Island—it can't be over a quarter of a mile wide there—and pack the grub over too. When a favorable day comes we can load her up and it's only a few miles down here. It's lucky for us, Gregg," he added placing a hand on the young man's shoulder, "that we have another strong back to depend on." . . .

As they talked evening closed in. From the alders

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on the hillside came the plaintive night-song of the golden-crown—the three notes of poignant beauty and mystery that were linked indissolubly with the summer twilights of Kon Klayu. Out over the reefs the sun had gone down splendidly into the sea. Broad ribbons of clear jade streaked the primrose of the sky. Beneath, bands of amethyst, amber and rose merged slowly into a flame of crimson, and while the violet dusk crept over the sea, the stars came out. Blowing across the bare brown reefs the night wind brought the scent of kelp and the muffled boom of surf.

The peace and promise of the sunset soothed all into silence for a time. Ellen and Jean and Lollie sitting close on the bottom step of the porch, watched in reverent wonder as the colors changed. At last the boy lifted his eyes to his mother's face.

"God smiles, mother," he said simply, resting his tired head against her shoulder.

Jean leaned across to her sister.

"Ellen," she said quietly, "I think I love best of all the evening-time of things, don't you—the fall of the year; the end of the day. I wonder—" a wistfulness crept into her voice—"I wonder . . . I hope . . . no, I *know* that when it comes, I'll find that the sunset time of life is the most beautiful!"

As she finished speaking she turned instinctively to look at the old man on the porch above her, the only one of them whose slowing feet had turned into the Sundown Trail. Kayak's hand, loosely holding his cooling pipe, rested on his knee. His sombrero backed his strong, bearded face, which had taken on the

serenity of the evening. His deep eyes were calm with revery. As she gazed the girl's heart was flooded with a pitying tenderness for him, for Kayak Bill who, because of something buried deep in his past, faced the sunset of life—alone.

She turned her face away—and met the warm young eyes of Gregg Harlan bent upon her. . . . Then suddenly she was glowingly happy because she was still young.

CHAPTER XV

THE GIANT BALLS OF STONE

IT was not yet five o'clock the following morning when Loll, from his blankets on the floor of the cabin living-room, raised his tousled head and looked cautiously about him. His big, grey eyes were alive with eagerness and expectation. The strangeness of his surroundings thrilled him with possibilities. Through the window the sun-flooded world called him to adventure.

Again he glanced speculatively at the sleeping forms round him and then eased warily out of bed.

With a pudgy finger on his lips and long steps of a stealthiness so exaggerated that his balance was threatened at every move, he tip-toed to the corner where his shoes lay, and without stopping for any further addition to his toilet, slipped out the door in his nightgown.

He avoided the blanket-cocooned figures of Kayak Bill and Harlan on the porch, and continued a short distance down the path to the chopping block where he sat down to pull the shoes on his little bare feet.

Kobuk, returning from some early morning adventure on the beach, espied him, and with a red-mouthed huskie smile, came bounding up the trail, wriggling an extravagant and clumsy welcome. With loud whispers

hissed through fiercely protruding lips, Loll tried to shoo him away, but the dog only whirled about, thumping him with a joyously wagging tail and poking a cold damp nose down the neck of his nightgown.

After fastening the top button of his shoes the boy stood up and looked about him. The wonderful sunniness of the world thrilled him. From the blue sky soaring gulls called to one another, and the sunlight poured down on the silver-green ocean and the little lake to the south. Faint breaths of air stirred the scent of green things, and everywhere was that exhilarating freshness of late summer that has in it the hint of autumn frosts.

The youngster waved his arms and danced from sheer joy in living, and with Kobuk at his heels, ran down off the trail through the damp grass toward the lake.

About a hundred yards from the cabin, hidden in a clump of alder bushes, he came upon a low hut built of drift logs. Half the roof was gone and pieces of decaying seal-hide and a ragged red shawl embedded in the dirt floor hinted of the visits of long-ago Indian otter-hunters.

Interested in his discovery, the little fellow was peering cautiously in, when, with a sudden bound, Kobuk dashed by him nearly knocking him over. There was a whirr of wings overhead, sounds of bird alarm, and half a dozen swallows circled wildly about the frantic Kobuk before finding a place of escape through the hole in the roof.

"Gosh, Kobuk, I was pretty near scared," admitted

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the youthful explorer, looking up at the rafters under which several nests made clay-grey splotches.

Swallowing hard a time or two he buttoned up the neck of his nightgown. Outside the hut again he slanted a discreet glance back in the direction of the cabin to assure himself that everyone still slept, and then with a whispered whoop of invitation to the dog, skipped down toward the beach.

The cabin stood well back on the bank off the center of a small crescent cove, flanked on the north by the bluff around which the party had come the day before. Toward the south the beach curved to what was marked "Sunset Point" on Add-'em-up's map. Loll tucked his nightgown up under his arm and headed for that unexplored territory, talking to Kobuk as he skipped along.

The tide was falling and screaming gulls rose and fell over the rocks feeding on the shellfish among the seaweed. Far out on the water great flocks of black sea-parrots floated, and overhead these stocky little birds flew in hundreds, their huge, crimson beaks thrust determinedly out before them, their round, white-ringed eyes showing plainly, and their wings, seemingly too small for their pudgy bodies, beating the air in a hurried manner, as they attended strictly to the business of feeding their young. Unlike the lazy gulls they took no time to loiter along the way.

The boy, looking up at the busy black workers, little dreamed of the vital and spectacular part both he and they were to play later in the struggle for existence on the Island of Kon Klayu.

The weed-covered boulders of Sunset Point drew him, but though he felt strongly the fascination of the ocean bed now becoming uncovered by the tide, for some indefinable childish reason he hesitated to go down among the rocks in his nightgown. So, whistling with moist tunelessness, he rounded the Point, Kobuk trotting on ahead.

Here the character of the beach changed, and the high-tide line, where the rice-grass began, was piled with a criss-cross confusion of bleached drift-logs thrown up by the mighty surf of storms. Mounds of old kelp lay drying in the sun, and the unforgettable odor of decaying sea-things mingled with the freshness of the morning.

Absorbed in the delights of discovery, Lollie poked about in the tangled masses finding strange, beautiful shells and sea-flowers fragile and delicately colored as the heart of a rose. He gathered his nightgown up into a pocket in front of him in which to carry home some of the damp and none too fresh treasures of the beach.

Sea figs in tan and orange and vermilion made splashes of color among the wet piles of shiny brown kelp brought up by the last tide, and small dead starfish turned pale stomachs to the sun. Grotesque, bulging seaweeds stirred him to laughter, and after untangling one—a head-like growth that seemed to grin sociably at him from a tail twenty feet long, he tied the thin end about his waist. The bulb wriggled along behind him on the sand, alternately piquing and repelling the curiosity of the sniffing Kobuk.

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Another point ahead lured him on. Clouds of sand fleas rose in rustling hops as he ran along. Here and there monster jelly-fish glistened in the sun. With his mouth in a continual O of admiration and wonder, the little fellow squatted repeatedly to gaze at the exquisite geometrical designs in their crystal depths; but after one or two half-hearted attempts to pry them apart to see how they were made he contented himself with adding one to his already overburdened nightgown. Even in the thrill of discovery he had an instinctive antipathy against marring a beautiful thing.

Kobuk, running on ahead, had found something which interested him. He stood looking back, woofing impatiently as if urging the boy to hasten and see what it was. As Loll came nearer he shouted in astonishment, increasing his gait with difficulty because of the impeding pocket in front of him. What he saw was a head of some great sea monster, perhaps twelve feet long. The dark skin was streaked with dull red and purple, and where the head had been severed from the body, the sea had whitened it to sand-encrusted tatters. The huge mouth lay open and twisted, and from the lower jaw protruded two rounded tusks, nearly a foot long.

There was a contemplative moment while Loll's eyes opened wide.

"Golly, Kobuk—" reverent awe was in his tones—"I bet-cha that's the whale that swallowed old Jonah!"

There was a singular fascination about the battered remnant, far gone in decay, but the stench from it finally proved so overpowering that, despite his intense

desire to linger near his discovery, Loll was obliged to move on.

He turned to the upper beachline for further explorations. Across a narrow strip of tundra-like land lay the small lake visible from the cabin porch. On the edge of the rice-grass he stumbled against a boulder that was as remarkably round as if it had been shaped by human hands. He stopped in delight at the great stone ball and tried to move it with his one free hand. Farther on he saw more of the curious spheres. Some were two feet and more in diameter.

"Maybe—giants played ball with 'em once!" he whispered to himself, with a cautious glance about him.

He headed for the tundra and was startled by coming suddenly upon the skeleton of a whale whitening in the sand where an extra high tide had thrown the creature long ago. Purple wild peas and blue beach forget-me-nots blossomed between the monster ribs, and the huge vertebræ, scattered here and there, were half hidden by the grass. It was from this relic, no doubt, that the Point opposite derived its name—Skeleton Rib.

Afterward Lollie's father utilized several of these vertebræ for stools, but seeing them for the first time, the little fellow looked down at them respectfully, hushed into silence by vague, sea-born feelings. Far down the beach to the southward rose the cliffs where thousands of sea-birds swarmed in the sunshine. Their screaming, softened by the distance, came to his ears with an eerie wildness. All at once he felt very small and alone among alien creatures. Kobuk had turned

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back without him and was bounding out of sight around Skeleton Rib. The giant balls of stone suddenly took on fearsome suggestions from the realms of fairy tales.

The dog had disappeared now. The plaint of a high-flying gull drifted down to the boy. A breath of wind whispered in the grass about the whitening bones. . . . Suddenly he was flooded with a very panic of loneliness. Grasping the folds of the nightgown more tightly before him he set out as fast as his little bare legs would carry him towards home, the trailing kelp attached to his waist bounding wildly along behind him. . . .

It was thus that Ellen, white-faced with anxiety, met her returning son as he rounded Sunset Point. She clasped him frantically to her to assure herself that he was indeed safe and sound, and then held him off at arm's length, surveying the havoc to his nightgown, and preparing for the admonishing that was due. But Loll had already learned to divert many a mild scolding by the relation of some startling discovery. He launched forth now on the subject of the whale's head and the stone balls that giants must have played with, giving embellishments so amazing that his eyes stood out in growing astonishment as he talked.

Out-maneuvered, Ellen led him to breakfast where he took his place still holding forth on the wonders of his adventures. Kayak Bill regarded him with an appreciative eye. Finally he drawled:

"Son, you sure do vocabulate most as well as a sourdough!"* He paused to take a long, slow swoop of

* Old-time Alaskan.

coffee and wipe his mouth with his red bandana. "The whale's head that et Jonah ain't so bad—but them giant hand balls o' stone sounds phoney. . . . You know there seems to be somethin' about this durned country that just nache'ly makes white men—not *lie* exactly—but sort o' put trimmin's on the truth. . . . I recollect a couple o' yars back when I'm hibernatin' one winter up on the Kuskokwim River with a bunch o' white trappers and prospectors." With his spoon, Kayak scraped the bottom of his empty coffee-cup to get every unmelted grain of sugar that lay there. "The next summer, I'm a son-of-a-gun, if them Injines up there ain't callin' that place by an Injine name that means 'The Valley o' Lies' I've sort o' got it figgered out like this: This doggoned Alaska land, bein' so big and magnificent like, a man just feels plumb ashamed to tell of some little meachin' thing a-happenin' in it—he feels downright obliged to fix things up so's they'll match the mountains and the rest o' it."

And drawing his corn-cob from the pocket of his hair-seal waistcoat, Kayak Bill shuffled off into the cabin to light it from a splinter thrust into the round draft hole of the Yukon stove, while Boreland and Harlan made ready to leave for the provision camp at the North end.

For five days after landing the weather continued clear, although the sea never became sufficiently smooth for a trip with the whale-boat. Each day the men of the party went down to the first camp to pack provisions across the Island to what they called the West Camp, the place from which they expected to load

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them into the whale-boat and take them by water to the cabin. When the entire outfit had been packed across, the whale-boat was also skidded over on small drift logs. By this means they avoided the long shoals which ran so far out into the sea.

"Now for a few days of smooth water," said Boreland, when the job was completed, "and we'll be able to take everything down to the cabin by boat. We must have this grub under cover before the autumn storms set in. The rougher the sea, the better chance for gold, so Silvertip—damn his cowardly hide—told me. Kilbuck said old Add-'em-up used to send his squaw out patrolling the beach after each storm, and she usually found patches of black or ruby sand which carried considerable gold. . . . It seems reasonable enough, Kayak, for it's the same with all placer diggings along the sea."

The three men seated themselves on the upturned boat to eat their lunch. Boreland, whose mind was ever dwelling on the time when he should be free to begin his search for the gold of Kon Klayu, talked on. Harlan listened in silence to the other's eager plans.

"But of course it's the *source* of the gold we want! Silvertip thinks it is thrown up out of the sea by the action of the waves. Kilbuck imagines it is washed down from the banks, although all the prospecting done by the fox-farmers revealed nothing. But—gold is where you find it, and I mean to leave no stone unturned while I'm here. . . . Speaking of stones," he went on after a moment's silence, "Loll was right about his giant balls of stone. Have either of you noticed here

and there along the beach, especially toward the south, small, perfectly round boulders? By thunder, they look exactly like cannon balls!"

Harlan, though he had at first attended the others' speeches had gradually become immersed in his own thoughts. Each day, while his muscles ached and the desire for stinging liquor flamed like fire in his veins, he had worked with Boreland and Kayak Bill at the North end of the Island packing provisions across on his back. Though he still ate his meals with the Borelands at the cabin, almost immediately after supper he took the mile and a half trail across the Island to the hut, which he had found on his landing. Intuitively, he knew Ellen Boreland's opinion of him. He smiled sometimes at the grim humor of the situation: He, who had tried to get away from the society of women found himself now on the mercy and generosity of a woman who did not like him. He was dependent on her, by Jove, for every stitch of clothing on him, for even the soap that he used—for his very toothbrush. Soon, he knew, she would be giving him provisions so that he might cook his own meals on the other side of the Island. She didn't want him around her, or her sister. It piqued him to be felt unwanted—aroused in him a desire to show her——

His innate honesty compelled him to admit that Ellen knew him in no hero's light. Still he could not help a feeling of bitterness at the relieved look that came, unconsciously, to her face each evening when he turned, reluctantly, from the homelike group on the cabin porch, to take the lonely little zig-zag trail up the hillside.

His mind went back now to a scene of the evening before. After supper just as he was preparing to leave, Jean had taken her violin from its case.

"I'm going to play, tonight, Mr. Harlan. Are you too tired to stay a while?" she asked, looking at him with friendly eyes.

Too quickly Ellen had interrupted:

"No, no, Jean. Don't keep this poor, tired fellow from his bed. I'm sure he wants to go to sleep as soon as possible. And here, Mr. Harlan,"—she advanced toward him thrusting into his arms a blanket and a pillow,—*"I found this extra bedding for your bunk today. . . . There now, tuck it under your arm, like this. . . . Good-night. . . . Sleep well. . . . Good-night."* Her voice was kind as she smiled up into his face, but there was no mistaking her meaning. With shame and resentment in his heart he had turned up the hillside trail.

On the brow of the hill he had stopped and flung the bedding angrily on the ground, himself upon it. Was he a criminal that he should be debarred from an hour's pleasure in the society of the only other human beings on this Island? Suddenly he felt that he hated Ellen Boreland. He hated all women. He hated all the world. The longing for strong liquor swept him, shaking him like a leaf. He could feel his chin under his soft young beard quiver. He despised himself for a weakling and a fool. He tightened the clasped hold of his arms about his knees and dropped his head upon them. The thought that had been tormenting him since the first day he began transferring the provisions,

came back now with an added urge. At the West Camp were flour, sugar, cornmeal and dried fruit. With those ingredients he could make himself the stuff that his system craved—make it as the Indians made it, with two kerosene cans and a long piece of hollow kelp. In his hut on the other side of the Island he could, undetected, heat the fermented mash in a can, attach the piece of kelp to the top and immerse it in cold water until the condensed steam came out at the other end in the form of Thlinget *hoochinoo*.

As he huddled there on the brow of the hill he had cradled the thought in his mind, planning in detail each step of the distilling. With provisions so low it would be impossible to take enough from the cache to make any quantity—but he might make sufficient to ease, just once, the intolerable thirst that possessed him. It might be six weeks before the *Hoonah* returned—six weeks of torment and loneliness.

Another thing had been troubling him of late. His thoughts had been returning to stories he had heard of Add'-em-up Sam who had died of delirium tremens at Katleean. Silvertip, when in liquor, was fond of detailing the last, violent days of the old bookkeeper. . . . Sometimes, Harlan fancied, he too was beginning to see those fearful shadowy images that dance on the borderland of insanity. How else could he account for that spectre of the tundra which he saw, sometimes, as he went home in the dusk—that dark, almost imperceptible figure far off toward the south cliffs where the lone tree of Kon Klayu stood on the brow of the hill? Was he too going the way of Add'-em-up Sam?

As he sat there he had cursed himself for ever leaving the *Hoonah* and risking his life to help a woman whose kind, polite aloofness irritated his drink-shattered nerves as an open declaration of hostility could not have done—a woman to whom he was merely a foolish young man who had chosen to get himself marooned, and whose presence forced her to calculate more closely the alarmingly depleted store of provisions left after the wetting of the tide.

Suddenly, in the midst of his bitter reverie, he raised his face from his clasped arms. Up from the cabin below floated the faint, pure harmony of violin strings. So exquisite, so lovely sounded the notes in the wide, wild loneliness of the evening, that Harlan sat for a moment with suspended breath. Gradually, under the spell of the music, he became aware of the beauty of the world about him. The after-sunset sky was a vast expanse of tender rose and blue deepening into violet on the long encircling horizon line. Below lay the wine-dark sea fringing with pale foam the sands of Kon Klayu. The noise of breakers on distant reefs was like the wind in the eucalyptus trees of his California home. . . . A flood of homesickness dissolved the resentment in his heart. . . . Gradually the old fears and haunting troubles faded from his lean young face. The low, vibrant tones of Jean's violin brought him comfort. The soft, rippling notes breathed him confidence, and the silvery chords lured him into the promises of the future. He felt equal to noble and heroic deeds—to fighting and conquering. From a sense of being out-cast and alone, he felt a sudden warming kinship with

all the world. With his heart expanding he came to his feet, the better to catch the harmony.

The time and air had changed into something vaguely familiar. . . . With a glow of pleasure he recognized it,—the lament of the funeral canoes at Katleean, but with something else added, something that made him feel the mystery and the weirdness and the elemental call of the North. It was almost as if she played to him comforting him with promises of this clean, new land of beginnings.

Abruptly, he remembered, the music had broken off. There was a moment's silence. And then there had drifted up to him Jean's invariable good-night to the deepening twilight. Sweet and clear from a long-drawn singing bow it came—a commingling of love and peace and beauty he had once heard a great contralto sing:

"In the West
Sable night lulls the day on her breast.
Sweet, good-night! . . . "

He had longed to throw back his head and sing these words to Jean's music, but he had shaken himself. No. That was a song for a lover. . .

"Son, are you plumb dead to the world?" Kayak Bill's words roused Harlan from his dreaming. He sprang up and began stacking provisions inside the tent. He realized as he worked, that today no tempting thought had come to him of secretly distilling hootch from stores he might take from this camp. The enormity of such an action struck him for the first

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time. This food meant life on Kon Klayu—and there was little of it. . . .

A few hours later headed down the long stretch of beach toward the cabin, he squared his shoulders under the heavy pack he bore and joined in with the voices of Kayak Bill and Boreland who, with lusty incongruity were singing the whaling song of the trading-post:

“Up into the Polar seas
Where ice is delivered free,
And a man don’t have to hustle
Like a blooming honey-bee!”

Work was hard in this country of the last frontier, but men had more time, more inclination to sing, he thought.

As he swung along the hard sand, in his heart was a sense of expectancy—for what he did not know.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STORM

THE following morning was sunless. The air was still and heavy with foreboding. Leaden-colored waters heaved under a gloomy sky and though the sea appeared smooth to the eye the hollow roar of distant surf sounded louder than usual. There was a strong smell of kelp and salt brine, and a new, wild note in the cries of the gulls.

"I say," Boreland called to Kayak Bill, who was tying back the flap of the tent in which he slept. "It looks as if there's a storm brewing. But I never saw the sea smoother. I think, if we're quick about it, we can get a boat-load of grub down here before she breaks. What you say, Kayak?"

Kayak spread his legs and leaned back to take a long look at the sky, just as Harlan came down over the hill and joined them.

"I'm yore man, Boreland," he said at last. "But we'd better be spry about it, for it'll be Davy Jones' locker for us if we get caught in a gale off the reefs."

A hasty breakfast over, Ellen joined the men and the four left for the West Camp to select the most important things with which to load the whale-boat.

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Arrived at their destination they worked swiftly, Ellen making her selection of necessities while the men skidded the boat down to the water's edge. It was soon loaded. A small pile of lumber from Katleean for making sluice-boxes and furniture was made into a raft to be towed.

"About three more trips with the boat, and we'll have everything down at the cabin," said Ellen, as she tied the flap of the tent. She had noted that while he worked, Shane had glanced uneasily from time to time at the grey sky. It was rapidly taking on a purple tinge, though the sea was still as oily-smooth as it had been early in the morning.

When the last sack had been stowed away and the raft made fast to the boat, Ellen saw Harlan call her husband aside. In a low voice she heard him make some suggestion which Boreland dismissed with a gesture.

"Thanks, old man," he said, "but this is a job for all three of us," and he turned to join Ellen who was standing at the edge of the water. "We'll be home in time for supper, El," he said, with forced cheeriness. "Don't worry, now—mind!" And he patted her hand reassuringly before he turned to the boat.

As she watched the craft slip away from the shore she conquered a wild impulse to reach out and drag it back again. Shane and Harlan shoved on their oars with long, slow strokes, as they faced the reefs that lay between them and the open sea; Kayak Bill steered. Ellen watched them move in and out between the protruding rocks. On the grey slope of the sullen

swells that rose and fell unbroken about them the raft in tow shone wetly yellow. From time to time she caught glimpses of streaming tangles of kelp which somehow suggested the floating hair of dead women. . . .

The boat crept off-shore to get outside the most dangerous of the reefs, and once free, Boreland, small now in the distance, looked back to wave a hand at her. At last, having seen the craft swing and move slowly southward on the home stretch round the Island, Ellen sighed with relief, and turning away from the sea, started down the beach toward the cabin.

Across the dark pall of the sky in the southwest clouds were beginning to form in heaving sombre masses. A breeze, coming at first in scarcely perceptible breaths, freshened almost in a moment, until the glassy surface of the sea was wrinkled and streaked far out with black. It was impossible to see the whale-boat now because of the barrier reefs. Ellen's heart grew heavy with foreboding. The wind . . . Remembering the tales of quick-rising wind and sea, she prayed that these fitful puffs might not be the first breaths of a borning gale.

She found Jean and Loll on the beach below the house. They had felt the danger of the coming storm and were looking out anxiously for a first glimpse of the boat.

Only rearing waters and lowering sky bounded their vision.

The wind increased.

Silence grew upon them.

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The cloud banks in the southwest separated into weird-shaped masses which detached themselves and began to travel swift and low toward them across the sky. Some menacing quality in this relentless, headlong rush increased Ellen's fears, and in growing alarm she watched the tiny white-caps that were beginning to form on the waves.

As they hurried down to the point off the bluff to command a wider view of the waters, the wind whipped their skirts about them and tore at their hair.

Three grey gulls flew swiftly overhead with plaintive, long-drawn cries quite different from their usual raucous screams. In her anxiety Ellen remembered that these wild birds of Kon Klayu had as many moods as the sea, and were prophetic of them. Loll, holding tightly to his mother's hand, looked up at her with grave eyes.

"Mother," he said, "Senott told me one time that sea-gulls are the souls of little dead Indian babies and they always cry for their mothers before a storm. Hear them now?"

Immeasurably sad and longing the bird call struck through the sound of increasing surf. Above, the whole sky was a mass of swiftly moving clouds. The wind increased steadily.

Another dragging hour went by with no sign of the whale-boat. With the incoming tide the wind had risen until Ellen's heart quaked with a great fear for the men who must row against it. Her senses tingled with the welter of torn, tempestuous sea and clouds that

seemed to mingle and snatch at her with stinging, salt fingers. Her straining eyes smarted from the high-flung spray of increasing combers.

Bracing against the gale, she suddenly found herself aching from the stress of trying, by sheer will, to keep back the force of the storm. Some pagan thing within her had endowed the elements with a godlike personality. She caught herself praying, beseeching the sea to rise no higher; to be kind to her loved ones tossing somewhere on its seething bosom. Both wind and tide were against the whale-boat now, and looking out across the rearing waters it seemed to her that no small craft could live in such a sea.

A few drops of rain stung her face. A far off from the southwest more was coming. . . . She turned hopelessly from it, then almost at once her dull misery was changed to joy.

Half a mile out a blurred, dark thing rose for an instant on the crest of a billow. She started to point it out to Jean, but simultaneously the rain-squall struck her, drenching, stinging, cutting off for a moment her view of the sea. From under the grey curtain of the driving rain combers of muddy green raced in, spouting high in wind-torn fury against the rocks and rolling swiftly toward her to fling themselves roaring at her. . . . Again in a lull she caught a glimpse of the boat tossing skyward . . . dropping from sight . . . rising again and creeping slowly, slowly onward. . . .

Hatless and coatless Boreland and Harlan were standing in the bottom of the boat shoving on the oars with every ounce of their strength. Twice she saw

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the younger man take the oars alone while her husband bailed. Kayak Bill, rigid, watchful, sat in the stern his hand on the tiller, ready with the instinct that comes of long experience for every motion of the sea.

Inch by inch they battled their way around the point in the face of flying spray and driving rain. Behind them, like a live thing tugging on the rope the raft rose and fell on the combs of the dark swells. Pathetic and tear-compelling was the courage of these three men pitting their puny strength against the pitiless violence of the elements. Once the little boat seemed to stand still a long time, swashing up and down in the hollows of the waves, while over it the chop of the sea splashed in spiteful fury. . . . At last it advanced again slowly and Kayak swung broadside, turning in towards the beach on which the anxious woman stood.

A gust of wind caught viciously at the tarpaulin spread over provisions in the stern. It carried its fluttering blackness straight back into the white and green of a giant comber directly behind. The onrushing breaker reared its cruel head . . . then just as another rain-squall broke, hiding it from view, it curled down swift, terrifying, and the whale-boat disappeared in its foaming maw. . . .

With a cry of despair Ellen rushed to the very edge of the surf, straining her eyes over the wild sea. Had the force of the breaker swept everyone from the whale-boat? Had the canvas stretched tightly over the provisions been sufficient to keep the water from filling and swamping the boat? Would the violence of the tide and wind bring them in if—if—Kayak Bill had

not been torn from his post? Suddenly she knew that on Kayak depended everything: Kayak Bill who had once been a pilot at surf-bound Yakataga; Kayak Bill who had run the raging bars of the delta-mouthed Copper River. Would he be equal to the surf of Kon Klayu? Could he keep his hold on the tiller? . . . Oh, if the rain-curtain would only lift! If she could but *see* out there in that foaming, roaring swelter of water!

She dashed a hand across her face tearing aside the wet hair that flattened itself against her eyes. . . . The squall was letting up. . . . She *could* see now, but there was nothing—nothing but breakers. . . . A sob tore itself from her throat. She started to turn away. Then dimly, she saw. . . .

Low in the water, veiled by flying white-caps, they came—Boreland and Harlan bailing desperately, and in the stern Kayak Bill, his hand still on the tiller, keeping the oarless boat steady a-top the swift, rushing wave that was sweeping them on to the beach!

With outstretched, welcoming arms Ellen waded out into the foam of the spent breaker that grounded the whale-boat almost at her feet. . . .

That evening the adventurers sat in the warmth of the crowded cabin living over again the events of the day. Every available corner was piled high with the wet provisions that had been unloaded from the whale-boat that afternoon, but contrasted with the gale outside the place was satisfyingly snug and comfortable. Still lingered the savory aroma of the duck

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mulligan that had been their supper. In the Yukon stove the fire roared and crackled as if in defiance of the terrific blasts that shook the cabin. The sense of kinship that comes to those who have fought their way together through some great danger was strong upon them all tonight.

"Holy Mackinaw, boys!"—Boreland emphasized his remarks with the stem of his pipe—"I wouldn't have given a hoot in Hades for our chances when that wave broke! Thought it was all day with us then. Kayak, Harlan, a fellow never realized what small potatoes he is until he looks *up* from the hollow of a wave!" He stretched his long arms comfortably and laughed. "But . . . after you've been up against a proposition like that, and come through, it certainly makes a man feel like a *man*!"

"It certainly does, Skipper!" Harlan's eyes glowed. He appeared more alive than at any other time since his landing, beginning to understand, evidently, something of the hard freedom of the North, for which men must either fight or die.

Of the three men Kayak Bill alone had been silent concerning his sensations. Ellen thought that the praise of the others had smitten him with a strange shyness. Loll was sitting astride the old man's knees, questioning him about that moment when the giant breaker had engulfed the boat.

Determined on an answer, the boy was urging for the fifth time:

"But, Kayak, what did *you* feel like?"

"Wall, son,"—Kayak's hazel eyes twinkled—"I just

couldn't figger out for a minute whether I was a clam . . . or a pond-lily."

In the laugh that followed Harlan took up a roll of blankets and went into the other room. There was no thought of his crossing the Island tonight. Kayak Bill's tent had blown down during the afternoon and he was, as he put it, "forced to seek better anchorage." He and Harlan were to spread a bed on the floor of the adjoining room.

Kobuk, with appealing whines and tentative pawings at the door, had finally won an entrance and was curled up in front of the stove. Just before supper Shane had come in lugging the pigeon's cage, which he placed carefully on top of a tall packing box. Ellen felt the bird's presence in a way that was beginning to trouble her. Tonight it seemed to wear a sullen and dejected look, unlike its usual bold air. All evening it had sat motionless in the bottom of the cage. The only sign of life it displayed was in the deep orange pupils of its eyes which, she was sure, followed her about wherever she went.

She forced herself to look away from the cage. A hush had fallen on those in the room. The shrieking of rising wind challenged attention. Ellen listened with a feeling strangely compounded of delight and terror. Never before had she known such a wind. It swept down on the roof of the cabin in woolies, threatening to blow it in, and then seemingly sucking it out again. The log walls quivered. Every joist, and board creaked and strained. The box on which the lamp stood vibrated, and the flat yellow flame flickered.

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The air reverberated to the thunder of surf that crashed against the hundred reefs on Kon Klayu. Ellen had a feeling that the little Island trembled in the splendid abandon of wind and sea—trembled, yet exulted in the freedom of the elements. She found herself paradoxically fearing, yet hoping that the next blast of the gale might be heavier.

Harlan had finished spreading the blankets in the other room. "Skipper," he said, "I've been wondering how the whale-boat is. Before we turn in I think I'll go down and see that we made the old girl fast." He took up his oilskins from the floor and slipped into them.

When the door had closed behind him, Kayak Bill looked at Boreland and nodded.

"I make affirmation," he drawled, "that there's a paystreak in any man who looks first after his hoss—or his boat."

While the significance of the old man's remark was dawning on Ellen, there was an odd lull in the storm. Surprisingly a new sound came to them. It was a sound blown from the south cliffs; a sound that was, yet was not of the storm; a hollow reverberating roll that was deep and mellow, thrilling and strange. Boreland and Kayak rose simultaneously and looked questioningly into each other's eyes.

"What—" Boreland's words were cut off by the flinging open of the door. White-faced and dripping Harlan staggered in, slamming it to shut out the driving rain. He leaned heavily against it.

"God—Skipper," he gasped. "The whale-boat—It's gone!"

At that moment, like a happening in a sinister dream, Ellen was aware that the pigeon perched high on the packing-box, had suddenly come to life. It was flapping its wings diabolically, exultingly.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE

THE loss of the whale-boat was a calamity staggering in its magnitude. It meant that every pound of provisions left at the West Camp must be packed on the backs of the men to the cabin. Not only that, but they were now without any means whatever of leaving the Island. Nothing but the direst necessity could have forced Boreland to seek the mainland in the frail craft, but, remembering that the Indians of the coast had been known to journey the hundreds of miles from Sitka to Kodiak in open canoes, there had been a certain feeling of assurance in the thought that with the whale-boat there was at least a chance of bringing help to the Island should it be necessary.

Boreland was the first to recover from the blow. The morning following the loss the three men were discussing it.

"Well, these post mortems get us nowhere," he said at last as he rose and prepared to stow the provisions away in the loft. "We'll tackle the job on hand now. After all, Kilbuck will be here with the *Hoonah* soon, and we can get another boat from him."

All that afternoon while the gale tore at the corners of the little cabin and the sea beat with in-

creasing violence on the beach and reefs, the men worked with hammer and saw, putting up shelves, making a table and a bedstead, and erecting two bunks for Jean and Lollie, one above the other in the adjoining room. Because he would so soon be leaving, Kayak Bill decided to pitch his tent again in the lee of the house as soon as the storm permitted, and occupy it until the *Hoonah* came.

The storm lasted three days. The second day the roof began to leak. The third day the rickety little porch blew down on one end and much of the chinking came out from between the logs of the cabin.

When, on the fourth morning, the wind died away and the sun burst out brilliantly upon a tumbling, muddy sea and rain-drenched landscape, Boreland's first thought was of repairing the house.

"We're in a devil of a stew here," he exclaimed after breakfast. "We'll have to get this place fixed up right now. Still, some of us ought to go down to the West Camp and take a look at the cache. Luckily there are no animals on the island, so we have nothing to fear from that source."

"Why can't Loll and I go down to the camp, Shane?" broke in Jean. "Then all you men can get busy on the house. The poor, little old thing looks as if it had a black eye, with the porch battered down over the door."

Boreland was at first not in favor of the idea, doubting that it was safe for them to go alone. At last, however, he consented.

"Keep to the upper beach line," he cautioned, as the

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two started out, "and remember, if the sea is breaking near the bluff when you come home, wait on the other side until the tide drops before you attempt to cross."

After the long confinement in the crowded cabin Jean was as delighted as her capering little nephew to feel again the freedom of the beach. In spite of all the hardships—perhaps because of them—she was growing to love the sands of Kon Klayu, and to look upon this incalculable ocean as a sort of fairy god-mother, who, with every tide, brought up something different to lay at her feet. She never started out for a walk along the sea without experiencing that delightful, childish sense of expectancy which is so keenly a part of the life of Alaska.

While Kobuk trotted on ahead she and Loll, remembering the talk of beach mining to which they had so often listened, scanned the way for ruby sand, the carrier of gold. But this morning the beach was untidy with great masses of fresh kelp and seaweeds from the deep, torn by the storm and scattered everywhere.

"Oh, look, Jean! The gulls have found something!" Loll's finger, pointing ahead indicated a cloud of screaming, white-breasted birds that were rising and falling on slate-tipped wings over some object below them. "Let's hurry and see what it is."

But Kobuk was before them. Dashing on ahead he plunged into the mêlée, frightening the gulls from their find so that they flew shrieking into the air as the girl and her little companion ran up to discover the remains of a large fish on the sand. It was a halibut nearly six

feet long. With the exception of the bones but a small portion and the head remained, for the birds had been gorging on it for some time. The flesh, however, looked fresh and firm and white.

Jean regarded it thoughtfully. "If we had nothing else to eat, Lollie, we *might* eat a fish like this—that is if we got it before the gulls had been at it." In an emergency even a great storm might be made to serve, since its very violence flung up from the deep such fare as this. At any rate, the gulls appreciated it, for even as Loll and Jean stood there, the birds had flown back, settling upon their find, their strong, lemon-colored, crimson-splotched beaks tearing greedily at the flesh. In their eagerness they flew thrillingly close, cold, gold-ringed eyes staring fiercely into the faces of the two, powerful wings fanning their cheeks. Loll, seeing Jean shrink away from an overly bold bird, took her hand and tugged her away from the discordantly screaming mass.

"Gosh, Jean, if those fellows were very hungry and I was alone, I bet they'd take a peck at *me!*"

Recalling a day at Katleean, when she had stood by a creek watching the salmon struggle up through the shallow water, while screeching gulls swooped exultantly down on the helpless creatures and gouged the eyes out of the living fish, Jean shuddered and quickened her steps.

They approached the tent cache at the West Camp. It appeared intact. The wind, being from the southwest had struck with full force on the opposite end of the Island. Jean untied the flap of the tent and went

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inside. The provisions were piled up nearly to the ridgepole at the back. Lollie, poking about, came upon a piece of rope, which, boylike, he took outside and wound about his waist. Jean heard him stumbling over the guy-ropes at the side. Then from the back came his call:

“Jean! Come here!”

The girl ran out and joined him. He was pointing to the back of the tent. The pegs which had fastened it to the earth were uprooted. The canvas swung free. But what filled her with momentary conjecture was that which lay at her feet. A sack of flour evidently had been dragged out from under the wall of the tent and ripped open, for the sand was whitened with the doughy mixture resulting from the rain.

At this moment it did not occur to the girl to be frightened. There were no tracks in the sand other than hers and Loll's. Evidently, she thought, in the haste to load the boat before the storm, the men had dropped the sack and it had burst open.

“But how careless of them, Loll, not to peg the tent down again,” she said. Loll, however, was already headed for the first camp-site made when landing on the northeast side of the Island. Her call brought his eager answer:

“Aw, come on, Jean, I want to see how drowned we'd be if we'd stayed there during the storm.”

Smiling to herself at the boy's love of dwelling on their narrow escapes from death, real and imaginary, the girl turned and picking up a stone drove in a few of the tent-pegs before she followed him.

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On each side of the trail great patches of rice-grass had been flattened from the force of the wind and rain, and the air was filled with the sweet smell of vegetation drying in the sun. As she approached the other side, the blue sky curved down to meet the ocean on a far straight line. The yellow-green of the sea was set off by astonishing areas of clearest cobalt blue, and the flying spray from combers breaking for miles out on the North Shoals, caught the sunlight in a glory of rainbow mist.

"See, I told you, Jean," Loll nodded sagely and pointed ahead as she overtook him.

A hundred feet above the place where the first camp had been the rice-grass had been torn out by the roots and whitened drift-logs and kelp were massed there confusedly.

In silence the girl stood looking at the spot. Emotions of fear, thankfulness and something of reverence swept her. Lollie, looking down over the freckles on his nose, vested the lower part of his face in his hand in a manner reminiscent of Kayak Bill.

"Escaped, by hell, by the skin of our teeth!" he gloated.

The tide had been coming in fast during the past half hour. Jean, noting it, suddenly turned back, and with uneasy haste began the homeward journey.

Opposite the little lake where Boreland had shot the first ducks, Loll insisted on running up to the beach line to look over and see whether there were any more birds feeding there. Jean, waiting for him, watched him make his way through the short grass to the

narrow, sandy lake-shore, and then stoop to look at something. . . . All at once he raised his head, and with a strange, blanched look on his little face, glanced quickly, fearfully behind him into the tall alder thicket toward the hill. Then, wide-eyed, he sprang toward her without a sound.

"Wha—what is it, Loll?" she gasped.

The boy's eyes shone with excitement. "It—it—it was a wild beast's tracks, Jean. This long—" He measured off about twelve inches between his trembling hands—"and it had claws—big ones that digged deep into the sand!"

"But there are no beasts on the Island, Loll! You must be mistaken!"

"No, no!" Loll's face quivered in his anxiety to convince her of the truth of his statements. Knowing the youngster's unconscious tendency toward exaggeration, she was doubtful. There could be no animal on the Island. But . . . to make sure . . . she herself would go back to see.

She looked about for Kobuk, but the dog had gone on toward the bluff. Impressing on Loll the necessity of remaining where he was until she should come back she turned toward the lake again, running.

As she drew near the margin, unreasoning terror of the unknown began to take possession of her. Every pile of driftwood, every alder bush became alive with sinister possibilities. She drove herself forward. She could see the stretch of sand where Loll had stood. She could see that there were marks of some kind upon it. Trembling, fearful, her heart beating like

a hammer in her breast, she pressed forward and looked closely at the marks. . . . Loll was right. Here on Kon Klayu were monster tracks of—what she did not know.

She wheeled swiftly and ran back to where the boy waited. Without a word she snatched his hand and fled with him down the beach toward the bluff and home.

Kobuk, far in advance, was picking his way along the bluff, and now as they ran Jean became aware that a new danger threatened them. The tide had come in so far that even from a distance she could see the foam of spent breakers washing up against the rocky wall ahead. Boreland had said to wait until the tide fell, before attempting to pass the bluff, but with the new, strange terror behind them, she had no thought of obeying. The sea, roaring almost at her feet, seemed kinder and more to be trusted than the unknown beast lurking in the alders, or perhaps slinking along, even now, above the beach line, watching, waiting to spring out at them any moment.

Arrived at the bluff she saw, with dismay, that all along, the back-wash of breakers licked the base. She stopped, tightening her hold on Loll's hand. She looked a long moment at the huge rollers of the incoming tide that crashed so close to her, and then back from whence she had come.

Loll raised his sober little face to the sky.

"God," he said, conversationally, "I guess *you'll* have to take a hand."

Jean slipped the rope from about his waist. She tied

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one end to him and the other about her own body in clumsy, womanish knots.

"Lollie,"—despite her efforts her voice quavered—"we're going to run for it. Cling tightly to my hand, dear."

At that moment a wave receded. They ran dizzily forward in the shifting, wet gravel of the beach. When the next incoming comber was beginning to curl down from the top, Jean dashed to the bluff. Shielding the little fellow below her, she clung to the uneven shale of its base, presenting her back to the billow that crashed with a deafening roar just behind her.

Swift, terrifying, the wash of the breaker boiled and foamed about their feet, to their ankles, to their knees. It made Jean's head swim. It paralyzed her power of thought, leaving her with only the instinct to cling. She had to wait while two more breakers rolled in and broke before she saw a chance to stagger to the next point of safety. It seemed to her that hours passed thus while she and Loll struggled, wet and battered, onward.

They had gone but two-thirds of the way when, glancing at the incoming wave to calculate how far they might run, she became aware of a mountainous unbroken roller immediately behind it—a watery monster that humped its back into a ragged, dancing crest high above her head. It advanced in eager, liquid blackness. She knew it must break nearly against the bluff where they stood.

Her desperate eyes espied a rough ledge just above

her. With the strength born of despair she caught up her nephew and tossed him to safety. Frantically she herself tried to climb the bluff. . . . She thought she heard a man's voice shouting to her. . . . There was a moment when Loll's white face looked down at her through a haze. . . . A moment when his little hands moved swiftly taking a turn with the rope about a ragged, upstanding piece of rock. Then a boiling, roaring sound filled her ears. . . . An avalanche of dark water crashed down upon her, freezing her, smothering her, crushing her. She felt her body thrown high against the stony wall. . . .

As she was whirled, choking, into darkness and oblivion there flashed through her mind the thought: "This, then, is how it feels to die."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PERIL OF THE SURF

AFTER Jean and Loll had left for the West Camp that morning Harlan, Boreland and Kayak Bill set to work repairing the roof of the cabin and the porch. From his position astride the peak Harlan could hear Ellen busy at her tasks indoors. As the tide began to run in he saw her come to the door from time to time and walk down onto the beach to look for the absent ones. Apparently she was vaguely uneasy. The Island's possibilities for good or bad were yet unknown to her and she was evidently never quite secure in her mind when any of her household was out of her sight. After one of the last excursions to the beach she had spoken of the fact that the waves had reached the base of the cliff.

"They won't be able to come now for a while," she said, addressing the men on the roof. And then she added: "Could two of you give me a little help inside. Shane? I need to move the bed."

Kayak and Boreland accordingly slid down from the ridge and followed her into the house.

Gregg paused in his work of nailing tar-paper over the boards, and stretched wide his arms. He was tak-

ing a cursory glance toward the incoming tide when his attention was attracted by the figure of Kobuk ambling up the trail from the beach. The dog was dripping wet and at intervals he stopped to shake himself violently. Kobuk must have been playing along the edge of the surf, Harlan thought. And yet, he must have crossed the sands below the bluff . . . and the tide was only an hour from the flood. . . . But of course Jean would not dream of attempting a crossing now. He took up his hammer again. . . . Suddenly he hooked it over the ridge. At any rate, he would go down and make certain. . .

Slipping off the roof he ran down to the beach. There he sped along its curve until his eye could command the length of the bluff. . . . He stopped aghast. Midway Jean and the boy were coming on, stumbling across the sand left bare by a receding wave, dashing to the ragged base of the cliff and clinging to it while the incoming comber broke and seethed about them, then rushing on again! Owing to the storm of the past days the billows were higher than usual. Also there was yet the most dangerous portion of the way to be traversed.

With a call for help Harlan started toward them, he also racing as the breakers ran out, and climbing the cliff out of their reach as they broke.

He shouted to Jean to attract her attention. If he could only sign to her to ascend the bluff and hold fast till he came! Vainly he tried to make his voice heard above the deafening roar. She neither heard nor saw him. . . . Desperately he plunged on, not taking time

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now to climb up for his own safety, but ploughing through the onrushing waves. Once a crashing comber caught and threw him flat on the shifting gravel. Before he could right himself it had sucked him almost into the maw of the next down-curling sea. Fortunately it was a small one. He was able to regain his feet and stagger to a hand hold.

Then at the same instant that Jean's eye caught it, he became aware of the huge, unbroken billow advancing toward the struggling figures of the girl and boy. He saw her snatch up the child and toss him to the safety of the ledge, saw her ineffectual efforts to follow . . . then the dancing crest broke and Jean became but a formless dark object tossed like a drift-log on the foaming waters that spouted against the foot of the bluff.

With a despairing cry, Harlan plunged forward, and as the great wave, the first of three, receded, he reached her.

Limp and unconscious she hung from the rope that bound her to the terrified small boy above, and he saw that the little fellow had taken a turn with it about a jagged rock. But for this timely precaution the girl must have been drawn back into the sea and the child with her.

An extra long recession of the water gave him time to lift the inert body and throw it across his shoulder, and thus, while the second giant roller broke at his back he gripped with his torn hands into the sharp shale and held on. As it ebbed he hoisted her to the ledge above him.

From the temporary safety of this narrow shelf he considered their chances. It was impossible to scale the face of the bluff above him, yet the tide would not be full for an hour. Owing to the enormous sea, they would all three be swept into the ocean if they remained where they were. There was but one thing he could do.

He laid a hand on Loll's quaking shoulder.

"Pal," he said quietly, "will you be afraid to stay here while I carry Jean to the other side of the bluff?"

The boy looked down at the clamorous, booming tide and hesitated. . . . He swallowed hard, blinking. Then he looked at the inert form of his aunt, and meeting Harlan's eyes, shook his head bravely.

"Good! Hang on tight then, old man, and I'll be back for you before you can say 'Jack Robinson'!"

He cut the rope about Jean's waist, and backing down from the ledge, took her again across his shoulder. As Lollie's hand reached out and began coiling the rope, he turned to watch the breakers, that he might time the first dash of his flight back to safety.

The tide was higher now, the combers nearer, and he had but one free hand with which to cling to the base of the bluff when the enveloping waters rose about him. He plunged. He staggered. . . . His senses after a few moments were bludgeoned into numbness by the roar of the sea; his body was sore from the impact of beating water and stinging gravel. He struggled on step by step, feeling his way along the shifting beach, until only the primal instinct of self-preservation was guiding him in the grim game with the tide.

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At last he reached the other end of the bluff. He reeled up to the dry sand and let the body of the girl slip from his shoulder. As he did so he heard a shout. Boreland and his wife were running down from the cabin trail. He did not pause but plunged back again through the drenching maelstrom.

In a moment their frantic calls were swallowed up in the deafening roar of waters. Would he have strength to fight his way back? Would he find the boy where he had left him, or had a comber swept him off the narrow shelf? Harlan was unutterably weary now. He longed to let go his hold on the rocky wall, to cease fighting, and let himself be taken out into obliteration; but he drove himself on . . . and on. . . . After a long while he gained the perilous perch where Loll bravely awaited him above the roar.

He rested a moment. The little fellow's absolute faith in him gave him the will to fight his way back again. He took the child on his shoulders and once more plunged into the watery hell.

How he returned to safety he never knew. He was conscious only of reaching the place where Jean lay . . . of asking whether or not the girl was still alive . . . then the great weariness overpowered him. He sank down on the sand beside Jean, and Lollie's glad shout, as he was clasped in his mother's arms, floated through his mental numbness like a clear toy balloon drifting up in a fog.

Three hours later Harlan was resting on the bed in the living-room. In the adjoining room where Jean lay in her little bunk he knew that the girl was hearing,

from Ellen's guarded lips, the story of her rescue. On recovering consciousness she had tried to rise, but one side, where she had struck against the rocks, was bruised and so painful that, though she rebelled, she would be obliged to remain in bed for the remainder of the day at least.

Loll had already told the story of the mysterious animal tracks by the lake, and the scattered flour at the cache. Boreland had taken his rifle and gone down to the place as soon as the tide permitted. As Harlan lay there thinking, he was filled with an intense relief—he knew now that the spectre of the tundra that had so worried him was no creature of his own disordered brain. Whatever it might be, it was of flesh and blood. He could speak of it now.

Boreland returned about supper time.

"Did you see 'em, dad?" shouted Loll as his father came in the door.

"What was it, Shane?" Jean called from the other room.

Boreland replaced his rifle in the rack over the head of the bed.

"Bear tracks," he answered succinctly. "Hind foot measures fourteen and a half inches!"

CHAPTER XIX

HOME-MAKING

"**I** FIGURE that the Kodiak cub the Alaska Fur and Trading Company brought over here as a pet, is now wandering about the Island a full-grown grizzly, instead of being in bear heaven, as the people of Katleean thought," said Boreland, as they all sat about the supper table. "Confound it, it makes it mighty bad for us, with all that grub down there at the West Camp! If the beast takes a notion he can go there and raise the very devil."

"I'll take my blankets down there tomorrow and guard the cache until we get the provisions transferred," announced Harlan, quickly. "I'd like to get a shot at a Kodiak bear."

"Son, I ain't a-castin' any asparagus on yore shootin' ability, but I claims the right to shoot that anamile myself!" spoke up Kayak Bill.

"Funny!" Boreland laughed. "I had the same idea myself."

After supper they discussed the problem of getting the remainder of the provisions down to the cabin at once. It was decided that each man should take a turn guarding the cache. Boreland finally left the conversa-

tion to Kayak and Harlan while he sat at the table silent, one hand clutching his hair, the other drawing queer-looking cart-wheels and figures on a paper before him. Just before the others started to leave for the night, he sprang up, with an exclamation.

"By thunder, I've got it!" he announced enthusiastically. "Fellows, we're going to make a nautical cart and sail her on the beach of Kon Klayu!"

The nautical cart, when completed, proved to be a hybrid contrivance with two large wheels. The wheels had a cumbersome appearance, owing to the double rims, which were tired with barrel-staves cut in two and mailed crosswise to prevent sinking into the sand. The top of the cart was a platform eight feet long and four wide, with two handles projecting at each end. Rising from its middle was a mast for which Kayak Bill rigged up a sail from a tarpaulin.

Boreland stood off and regarded the finished child of his brain. Beside him Kayak eyed it for some minutes in admiring silence.

"By—hell!" he drawled at last. "Sired by a whisky barrel, spawned by a stretcher, and a throw-back to a Chinese sampan!"

Boreland laughed. "I got my idea for this little beauty from something I read once about the sailing wheelbarrows used by farmers in the interior of China, Bill! I'll bet you, with a fair wind, we can make all of five miles an hour with her on the beach!"

The cart exceeded even its builder's expectations. Steered to the West Camp the next afternoon it was

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loaded with provisions and the sail hoisted. With Harlan between the two front handles and Boreland at the rear, the odd vehicle was headed toward home. The sail, twice as large as the cart, strained at the mast from the force of the wind behind it, and to the men between the handles, the load seemed hardly to matter at all. Barefooted, with trousers rolled up to their knees as in boyhood days, the two men found it a new and distinctly pleasant sensation to be swept along thus before wind. In a few minutes Kayak Bill, smoking placidly before the provision tent, was left far behind.

Remembering the back-breaking loads he had carried to the cabin, Harlan grinned back at the bellying sail behind him as he sped along.

"This is child's play, Boreland!" he shouted to his partner. "The problem of transportation is solved; for if there's one thing we never lack on Kon Klayu, it's wind!"

And so it came about that, thanks to the nautical cart, which though the subject of much jesting, did the work, a month from the time of landing found all that remained of the adventurers' outfit transferred to the cabin. Not once during this time was the bear seen in the vicinity of the cache, though sometimes fresh tracks appeared on the margin of the little lake—now christened Bear Paw Lake—where Loll had discovered them.

With the boards taken from the tumble-down shack an extra shed had been built near the cabin, and the porch repaired and strengthened. Harlan found time to make a much larger cage for the pigeon. As he

told Ellen, the bird, confined in such close quarters, might not thrive.

Harlan noticed that despite Ellen's determination to leave the Island on the coming of the *Hoonah* she took a woman's delight in doing her best to make life comfortable with the few things at her command. Since it was the dictum of fate—if she would be with the man she loved—that she must spend so much of her married life in tents along new trails, floating down rivers in flatboats, or wayfaring in trappers' cabins, she sooner or later accepted those conditions. Doubtless, many times she rebelled in her heart. Any woman would. But, he fancied, she was the kind who would chide herself for the momentary disloyalty to Shane and with an increased tenderness, set her capable, feminine touch to perform some new marvel of transformation in each wild place of the moment.

In the cabin on Kon Klayu she accomplished much. With newspapers and magazines found in the box of books from Add'em-up Sam's collection, she papered the rooms. At the new windows which framed a wide expanse of ever-changing sea, giving a sense of space and freedom to the living-room, she hung cheese-cloth curtains. The folds of these draped a book shelf beside the window, supporting few books but holding in its empty space the gold-scale, unused as yet on Kon Klayu, and glinting newly as it caught the light on its polished surface. In a corner of the room the bed was gay with Indian blankets and bright cushions. The homely cheer of a red tablecloth was reflected in the bright nickel of the shaded lamp on the table, and on

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the white, sand-scoured floor a long strip of rag carpet from Ellen's old home in the States, made a note of old-fashioned, comforting cleanliness. On the Yukon stove the kettle sang cheerily to the pots and pans hanging in a shining row on the wall behind and the room was pervaded by the faint, clean smell from the wood-box piled high with newly-split wood that had lain long in the sea.

Harlan followed Boreland into the house the day Ellen finished her curtains. He came upon the big prospector standing with his arm across his wife's shoulders.

"I'm blessed of the saints, entirely," Shane was saying, as he bent to lay his cheek affectionately against her hair. "God love you, Ellen, little fellow. . . . you could make a home out of a drygoods box." . . .

After the rescue of Loll and Jean at the bluff, Harlan noticed that Ellen's silent gratitude found vent in a dozen little ways, though he was aware also that he never had an opportunity of seeing the girl alone. Since the *Hoonah* was expected any day now, Ellen had suggested that the young man bring his blankets across the Island and "bunk" with Kayak Bill until their departure. Had it been offered three weeks earlier, this arrangement would have been eagerly accepted. But Gregg's attitude toward life on Kon Klayu had changed. It was still changing.

He was now cooking his own meals at the Hut, clumsily, it is true, since his unaccustomed hands had never before held a frying-pan. But he was learning, and he was surprised to find himself taking pleasure in

the experience. He thanked Ellen for her invitation, but refused it. He would not have been human had he not felt a certain satisfaction in doing so.

He wondered tentatively if Kayak Bill had suspected the struggle that was going on within him during his first days on the Island—the fear of delirium tremens, the fight he was making to conquer the craving for liquor which continued, intermittently now, to torment him. The old man said nothing on the subject, but on one pretext or another Harlan noticed that Kayak managed to spend much of his leisure time at the Hut. Often, if the night were fine, he would roll up in a blanket before the fire and stay there until morning.

Kayak Bill's sauntering feet had followed Dame Fortune over every gold-trail from Dawson to Nome, and there was no trick of Alaskan camp life that he had not learned. He never tried to force his knowledge on the younger man, but casually, in the course of his slow, whimsical monologues, he taught Harlan much that was of inestimable value to him. Indeed, if it had not been for the old man, Harlan might have been forced to swallow his pride long before and ask for shelter at the Boreland cabin, for despite his brave talk of living in the Hut, it was a shelter of the rudest type, built, probably, as a feeding station by the experimenting fox-farmers.

Its structure interested him. It was made by standing whale ribs up on end about two feet apart in a circle. The spaces between were filled with turf, which abounded all over the island, thus making a wall two feet thick. Harlan had repaired it, and in the words

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of Kayak who helped him, had "rigged" himself up a stove from kerosene cans. It was the old hootch-maker who showed him how to arrange stones to form a crude, open-air fireplace in front of his door for use in fine weather. It was Kayak Bill who taught his blundering hands the trail way of stirring up a bannock and baking it in a frying-pan propped up before the blaze.

Harlan now had less time to think about himself. The little can stove required much finely chopped firewood to keep it going. The open-air fireplace consumed large quantities of drift which he had to chop with an axe, since the one saw on the Island was needed at the cabin. After his day's work with Boreland, he had his meals to prepare. There were brown beans to clean and cook, and sourdough hotcakes to set for the morning. Kayak had taught him to prepare his sourdoughs—a resource which was to become the food mainstay of all on the Island. Harlan learned from the old man that the sourdough hotcake, or flapjack is as typical of Alaska as the glacier. The wilderness man carries, always, a little can filled with a batter of it; with this he starts the leavening of his bread, or, with the addition of a pinch of soda he fries it in the form of flapjacks. So typical a feature of Alaska is the sourdough pot that the old timer in the North is called a "Sourdough."

Harlan grew to have a real fondness for his Hut—the only home he had ever made for himself. Its very primitiveness endeared it to him. He grew also to look forward to the fine evenings when he and Kayak,

stretched before the open fireplace with their backs to a bleached whale rib, smoked and yarned and sang, while they watched the leaping driftwood flames.

Strange, picturesque characters of the last frontier stalked through all Kayak Bill's tales: Reckless Bonanza Kings of Klondyke days, buying with their new-found gold the love of painted women; simple-hearted, gentle Aleuts kissing the footprints of skirted, bearded, Russian priests; pathetic, gay ladies of adventure; half-mad hermits of the hills; secretive squaw-men, and wistful, emotional half-breeds—all these Kayak Bill made to live again in the glow of the evening fire.

In his quaint, whimsical way he told of the prospector—that brave heart who makes gold but an excuse for his going forth to conquer the wilds. Harlan came to understand them—the lure of gold, and their slogan: "*This time we will strike it.*" Through Kayak Bill's eyes he saw them aged, broken by the rigors of many northern winters, but with the indomitable spirit of youth still in them, a recurrent yearning that defies age, rheumatism and poverty, and sends them with their grub-stakes out questing into the hills. He saw them, with picks, and gold pans wandering happily during the wonderful Alaskan summer and fall, and when the frost paints the green above timber-line with russet and gold and the Northern Lights beckon them back to the settlements, he saw them arrive, tired, penniless, perhaps, but satisfied, and already planning the next trip into the magnetic golden hills.

And one night, being in a pensive mood, Kayak told of a partner of his, the Bard of the Kuskokwim,

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an old northern poet unknown except in the Valley o' Lies, who had put the prospector's soul hunger into verse :

"We yearned beyond the skyline,
With a wistful wish to know
What was hidden by the high line,
Glist'ning with eternal snow.
And we yearned and wished and wondered
At the secrets there untold,
As the glaciers growled and thundered,
Came the whisper : "Red, raw gold!"*

As if he feared Harlan might think him sentimental, Kayak Bill finished his recital with :

"Yas, son, that old cuss partner o' mine was always recitin' them poetry sayin's o' his. Durned if he wouldn't vocabulate to the trees or the hills when there warn't another soul nearer to him than a hundred miles!"

But of Kayak Bill, himself, Harlan noted, there was never a personal thing. In all his tales the old hootch-maker was ever the spectator, amused, kindly, philosophical.

Sometimes the two were silent—with the companionable silence that the camp-fire instills. Leaning back against the whale-rib, while the embers died in the fireplace and the sea below took on its veil of twilight, they mused and listened to the universe. It was at such times that Harlan began to feel, though faintly,

* From the unpublished poems of Edward C. Cone, Bard of Kuskokwim.

the healing, vibrant energy that comes to those who live close to Mother Earth. Katleean and the bunkful of liquor that at first had occupied so much of his thought, occurred to him less frequently. The States—and all that had happened to him there were becoming a dream. He began to feel as though he had always lived as he was living now. To his surprise as the time drew near for the arrival of the *Hoonah* he found himself unconcerned, indifferent. Like Kayak Bill, he was learning to face life serenely, undisturbed as to the morrow, but doing his best today.

CHAPTER XX

GOLD

TOWARD the end of September another heavy gale swept the Island. This time the little party was snug and warm in the cabin with the provisions under cover, and while the storm raged outside, Ellen and Boreland climbed up into the loft and made a list of the supplies on hand. In the log Ellen had begun to keep the day they landed on Kon Klayu she made this entry :

“Heavy gale blowing from the southwest. We hear again that strange rolling sound from the south cliffs. Discovered today that all rolled oats and flour is musty from being wetted by the tide when we landed, and much of it is spoiled. Fortunately the flour caked on the outside and the inside is fairly well preserved. We used the last of our butter today. We have sugar for one more week.”

Though she said little her growing anxiety communicated itself in some occult way to the other members of her household, even to Loll, to whom she gave daily lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic. The little fellow was at this time moved to write and illus-

trate a book on some discarded letter-heads of a defunct life insurance company. Ellen breathed a prayer of thanks that he so well entertained himself on stormy days.

On the first page of this work appeared the text of Old Mother Hubbard written in the boy's large, childish, downhill hand with spelling of distinct originality. Above it in a flaming red wrapper a lady with a large bust and impossible tiny feet, slanted tipsily toward some shelves—conspicuously empty, while in the offing quite aloof from the lady a lean, pale-green animal stood with despondent drooping head and tail. Other nursery favorites that had to do with eating and food, followed. They were illustrated in red and black and green. The red was made by a crayon pencil, miraculously produced by Kayak Bill; the green was obtained by the simple expedient of chewing up rice-grass. Toward the end of the book were many of Lollie's own poems, composed for his mother, and beautified with marginal decorations of flying gulls, sailing ships and fat button-eyed daisies, all bearing evidence of repeated erasures with a wet little finger.

“The red sun sinks down in the sea of the West,
The wind goes to sleep.
Seagulls flies homes to their nests.
And the gold stars their watches keeps.
I think the weather will be fine.
So the *Hoonah* can come in.
If she don't we will be out of grub.
And O, what will we do then.”

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Thus Lollie indicated the unspoken thought which underlay all the activities of the Boreland household now. They were subconsciously counting the days until the White Chief should come to the Island with the *Hoonah* and, while they counted, they were beginning to fear.

During the time of this second great gale Boreland and Kayak Bill made ready for mining by making a gold-saving device called a rocker. It was a box-like affair four feet long, eighteen inches wide and the same dimension in height. The front end was open as well as the top and it was mounted on rockers like a cradle. Over the back end was a sieve or hopper, and immediately beneath slanted a frame covered with blanket cloth. The pay-dirt was to be poured into the hopper and running water turned in on it. While the cradle was rocked with a jerky movement the sand sifted down through the hopper to the slanting apron. Much of the gold, Boreland explained, would be caught in the nap of the apron, and in the little sag at the bottom of it, but the sand would flow on out over the bottom of the rocker which was also lined with blanket cloth held down by cleats nailed crosswise at intervals. The sand, being lighter than the gold, was washed on down the length of the rocker floor and thence out on the ground, while the cleats and the rough nap of the cloth caught any further yellow metal.

With his Irishman's gift for seeing life through childish eyes, Boreland made a small duplicate of the rocker for his son's use, a gift which, in a way, was for the purpose of distracting Loll's mind from a mis-

fortune which had befallen Kobuk during the storm. The dog in playing about the shed where the men were working, had knocked down the long cross-cut saw, and the sharp teeth had fallen with full force across Kobuk's right foreleg cutting it cruelly and, it was feared, cracking the bone. Shane had cleansed the wound with the last bit of antiseptic and bound it up in splints, but Kobuk's limping had brought forth Loll's extravagant proffers of sympathy.

The first receding tide after the six-day storm found the whole party on the beach. With the provisions under cover and the cabin repaired all was clear for the mining. They were patrolling the beach for prospects.

Kayak Bill and Gregg turned southward toward Skeleton Rib, as Harlan's growing interest in the round boulders of that vicinity often drew him there. Shane and his family took the beach around the bluff toward the north. Ellen carried the rifle, for though there had been no time yet to hunt, especially for the great bear that roamed Kon Klayu, she was always on the alert. Boreland, happier than he had been since his landing, was at last outfitted with a shovel and a gold pan, emblems of his romantic calling.

Each storm that tore the Island produced a different effect on the beach. When they rounded the bluff this morning, instead of finding piles of seaweed and gravel tossed up as they had after the first great gale, they were surprised at vast areas of bedrock from which every vestige of sand had been swept away. Tiny rills of water, drainage from the tundra banks above the

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beachline, flowed down the shallow crevices of the clayey, hard substance.

Jean, who had never seen a nugget in its native state, was excitedly seaching for pieces of gold. Ellen smiled to see her, with Loll at her heels, running hither and thither, expecting any moment to come upon large, brassy-looking lumps resting like eggs on the hardpan.

Boreland skirted the edges of the bedrock.

They had reached the vicinity of Bear Paw Lake when abruptly he dropped to his knees and looked keenly at the formation beneath him. In an instant they were all running toward him.

He raised his face transfigured with an eager joy.

"Gosh all hemlock!" he exclaimed. "Here it is at last! Ruby sand—*kon klayu!* Look, El! Jean!"

At the edge of the bedrock dark beach sand was mixed with minute garnet-like particles that imparted to it a tinge of ruby. A first glance revealed nothing but rills of water running down through the sand carrying it through the depression in the bedrock. Like live things the atoms crawled slowly along the seam. Suddenly each watcher caught her breath. Amid the shifting flow there came a glint—then another. A second later, in the roughened surface of the bedrock lay flakes of virgin gold!

Gold!

No thrill that gold can buy ever equals the wild ecstasy experienced by those who find it. Jean threw her arms successively about her happy sister and brother-in-law, and finished by capering over the bedrock with Loll as a willing partner.

When the first excitement had spent itself, Boreland sent the boy to Kayak Bill and Harlan with word to bring shovels and the wheelbarrow. It was necessary to gather and convey the pay-sand to a place of safety before the next tide covered it, as the surf of Kon Klayu was too heavy to permit surf-mining. Marking the spot with a piece of drift Boreland continued down the beach with the others.

They followed the shore as far as the site of the West Camp looking for further patches of ruby sand, but found none.

Having learned that by the aid of a hairpin and Boreland's knife they could pick up the colors of gold that were caught in the crevices, Ellen and Jean were on their knees examining the seams in the bedrock when Kayak and Harlan arrived. The particles of gold were extraordinarily flat and thin, and the largest flakes only could be seen with the naked eye. There were few of these, but no miner was ever prouder of his spring clean-up than was Jean of the ten colors she collected in her drinking cup.

Harlan could hardly credit his eyesight when he beheld the yellow flakes Jean showed to him. . . . Gold on the Island of Kon Klayu after all! . . . Then he recalled that on that memorable night of the Potlatch dance the White Chief had admitted there was gold, but while the tides occasionally uncovered pay-sand rich beyond most placers, there would follow months when not a single color showed up in the sands of Kon Klayu. It was not a paying proposition. This deposit of ruby sand must be what Kayak Bill called

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a mere "flash in the pan." Though he tried not to let his co-workers become aware of it, Harlan was filled with doubts.

All that day, while the tide permitted, the men wheeled pay-sand to a place of safety above the high-tide line and the following morning, the cart, speeding before a spanking breeze, carried all the mining outfit, including Loll's rocker, down to the pay-dirt. Ellen, because of household duties was the only one to remain at the cabin.

Once more the night-tide had shifted the sands, and they found no trace of any gold-carrier. The bedrock that had been bare the day before now lay under several feet of gravel. The complete change in the topography of the shore was almost weird. It filled them with wondering and a strange respect for the mysterious workings of the sea.

The rockers were set up on the beach just below Bear Paw Lake, and with a flume made of a series of boards nailed together in a V-shape, water was conveyed to the hopper of the rocker. Jean and Loll, before beginning their own preparations, watched while Boreland and his two helpers rocked out the first gold. After glints of yellow began to appear in the nap of the cloth apron, they turned to their own outfit.

Harlan solved their water problem by digging a hole below the large rocker and catching the waste after it had done its work above. Long before the pool was completed he and Jean were on terms of laughing friendliness. This was the first time he had been with her, without being uncomfortably aware of

the watchful and disapproving eye of Ellen. He felt a distinct exhilaration.

He poured sand into the hopper while Jean rocked and Loll, detailing much little-boy wisdom, dipped up the water from the hole beside them.

Though it was her first year in the North, Jean, he thought, had fallen into the ways of the country with the natural ability that marks the young sea-gull launching out on the deep. Evidently she had dressed hastily that morning. Her khaki-flannel shirt, belted loosely with green leather and worn like a Russian blouse, lay open at the throat. Her mass of dark hair was tucked under a green tam o' shanter perched at an unconsciously rakish angle. Unframed by her hair her face had a piquant, boyish look, and her wide-set hazel eyes seemed larger than usual. There was a ghost of a golden freckle or two on the bridge of her straight little nose. From her green tam to her stout leather boots Harlan could find no evidence of a single feminine artifice—not a thing, perhaps, that might have appealed to him a year ago,—yet he was conscious of a stir of pleasure as he looked at her.

He placed a shovel of sand in the hopper, spilling half of it on Lollie who was at the same moment pouring in water. The girl laughed at his clumsiness, as she loosened her hold on the rocker handle and straightened, tossing her head so that the tam assumed a different but equally alluring angle. Her sleeves were rolled to the elbow. She had the lithe slimness, and the greens and browns that suggested the outdoors. When she turned away from him presently to look out

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over the sun-lit sea, Harlan rested his shovel in the sand to watch her.

"I wonder where my Kobuk is this morning?" The remark came from Loll squatting at the edge of the water-hole, waiting for it to fill again.

Neither answered him.

"Have you noticed how clearly, on days like this, one can see the mainland, though it is ninety miles away?" Jean asked, her mind apparently intent on the far horizon. "There seems to be something in the atmosphere that brings it nearer."

"I *whisht* I knew where my Kobuk is, I do!" murmured Loll plaintively. The youngster was evidently getting tired of work. He was filling the pail listlessly, emptying the contents over his own red little hand.

Jean's eyes roaming out over the shining ocean spaces, rested upon a spot in the northwest. Very low on the rim of the sea lay a mountain range, its purple and white ethereal in the distance.

"I *said* I *whisht* I knew where my Kobuk is!" There was a slight belligerent tone in Lollie's voice which Jean, doubtless, failed to catch, for she mused on:

"Though I know that coast over there is practically uninhabited it always gives me a feeling of being closer to people when I can see it—and a sense of delightful unknown things lying just there beyond the range." She paused as if contemplating some illusive thought.

Harlan, looking at her profile, became aware that her chin, while of an engaging firmness, had that impalpably soft texture that suggests the powdered wing

of a creamy butterfly. He was surprised that he had never noticed it before. The tam slanted obligingly to the other side and left exposed the lobe of a small ear that was as rosy in tint as the delicate tiny clam shells he occasionally marveled at on the beach. The curve at the back of her neck had the look that invites kisses in a very little girl who has her curls knotted up on the top of her head. . . . He found mining a distinctly agreeable occupation.

"You are like a soft, cool breeze from the sea, after a hot day in the city," he was astonished to find himself saying. But his statement was lost in a verbal explosion from the enraged Lollie.

"Gosh darn it! *Nobody* 'll notice *me*!" The little fellow was looking up at Jean with petulant indignation. "I'm going to find Kobuk!"

He flung his pail to the sand as if casting all thought of fickle woman from him and ran off down the beach toward the cabin, deigning not to hear Jean as she called to him.

"The poor little man!" The girl's voice was sympathetic as she looked after the flying figure of her nephew. "I know he must feel lonely sometimes with no one of his own age to play with."

"It's a feeling he shares, then, with some of us older ones."

Jean glanced at Harlan quickly. "Then why—" she began, and checked herself.

She wanted to ask him why, if this were so, he had buried himself in the isolated post of Katleean. She wanted to know why he, young, educated, brave, with

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the world of opportunity before him had immersed himself in the lazy, dreamy life of an Alaskan trading post. Was he of the stuff that Silvertip was made—Silvertip who was content to do odd bits of work for the White Chief at Katleean, for which he took his pay in tobacco or some other luxury necessary to his own comfort, while the energetic Senott kept his house, gathered and chopped his wood, salted fish, canned berries, dried clams and put down sea-gulls eggs in salt for the winter? Was this good-looking young creature a squaw-man at heart, if not in reality.

A squaw-man! She was intensely interested in those strange members of the white race who go native. She had not the contempt for them that Ellen felt. She had only a kindly desire to understand their point of view. In a way she could account for the White Chief. Katleean was his wilderness kingdom where he ruled white and native alike by sheer strength of arm and will. Silvertip, ignorant, lazy, weak, she could also understand vaguely. But there were others. She recalled a day on the beach at the trading-post when she had met a tall, blond man. He was sitting on the edge of his canoe nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, while his Indian wife and four little half-breed children dug clams a few feet away. One minute he had talked to her of the effect on character of the geographical aspect of the country, sprinkling his remarks with "Schopenhauer maintains" and "Nietzsche says." In the next breath he had informed her proudly that he and his children were of the eagle totem—claiming it by reason of his Thlinget wife's clan.

The incident remained vivid in her mind, setting up never ceasing queries of "Why?" "How?" Neither Ellen or Shane encouraged her attempts to discuss these conditions. . . .

Jean's thoughts wandered on. It occurred to her that Ellen seemed to be changing, too. There was not the old freedom of speech between them that had always existed prior to their coming to Kon Klayu. Perhaps it was her own fault, for lately, especially since the day at the bluff, she had resented Ellen's attitude toward herself and Gregg Harlan. There were many things she wished she might talk over with the young man. Her interest in squaw-men, for instance—but of course that would be impossible, she reminded herself. She had nearly forgotten—there had been that Indian girl, Naleenah.

As if in answer to her unspoken thought, Harlan turned to her impulsively.

"There's something I want to tell you, Miss Wiley, about—about that little Indian girl—" He stopped, his tanned face flushing. It was as if he had no words to express himself in terms that she would understand. "You see I—I——"

"Ahoy, there, Gregg! Jean! A ship! Look, it must be the *Hoonah*!" Boreland's joyous call broke in on them. He had run down from his own rocker and was pointing far out where the sunlight fell on the sails of a vessel heading directly for the Island of Kon Klayu. It was the first sail sighted since the schooner went away.

"Hurrah boy! She's coming with the provisions!"

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Boreland tossed his cap into the air. "Jean, run down to the cabin and tell Ellen the glorious news!"

The girl looked at the approaching ship a moment. Happy as she was at the sight she could not help wishing that Boreland had discovered it a few minutes later. She leaned toward Harlan.

"Tell me some other time," she said softly, and with a word to Shane started for the cabin.

She found Ellen, who never threw anything away that might later be used for food, rolling some hard, sea-soaked lumps of flour beneath the rolling-pin trying to crush them fine enough to use.

"O, angel child, you won't have to save that stuff now!" Jean shouted, bursting in upon her. "The *Hoonah's* coming! We sighted her!" She caught Ellen about the waist and whirled her madly over the floor, releasing her suddenly to dash out the door with a "Come on, sis!"

The two arrived breathless on the point of the bluff from whence the ship was visible, and whence the men had gathered. Jean began eagerly pointing out the sail, but even as she did so, she faltered. She turned and caught the sickening look of disappointment on the faces about her. A thin line of smoke was now trailing out behind the vessel. It was not the *Hoonah*, but a steamer. Also it had swerved in its course and now, broadside to the Island, it was headed south.

"O-o-o!" With a world of hopelessness in her voice Jean uttered the sound and threw her arm about Ellen's waist. Together they watched the departing

vessel with that desperation of heart that hopes, even while the brain knows there is no hope. A quarter of an hour passed, but the ship did not change its course.

They turned from the sea to find that the men had begun to gather up the tools and the clean-up from the sand.

"It's a cannery steamer, El, with the sail up, going to the States for the winter," Boreland said, dully. "The salmon run is over."

Ellen was not listening. She had taken her eyes from the fast vanishing steamer and was looking anxiously down the empty beach toward the far away rockers.

"Shane . . . Shane . . ." she faltered now. There was a queer, frightened tone in her voice that sent a chill to the hearts of her listeners. "Where is Lollie?" Boreland wheeled about.

"Why, he went home to you two hours ago, El! Haven't you seen him?"

"No!" Ellen's alarmed gaze sought his. Forgotten was the ship, the gold, the people about them; forgotten was everything else in the world but the soul-gripping parental fear they saw reflected in each other's face.

"The grizzly!" The mother's white lips whispered the words the father dared not utter. "O, Shane, come! Quick! We must find him!"

CHAPTER XXI

KOBUK

BORELAND and Kayak Bill searched the beach below the cabin for footprints while Harlan took the trail across the Island toward his Hut. Ellen and her sister hoping that the boy had returned during their absence, ran home to look into every nook and corner. . . . The silence drove them once more into the open.

Ellen, her throat tightening with unshed tears, stood on the porch and called:

"L-o-l-l-i-e! . . . S-o-n!"

The only answer was the mocking cry of a gull floating high in the sunlight. . . .

Boreland came hurriedly up the trail from the beach.

"There are no tracks in the sand toward Sunset Point, El, but Kayak is going along Skeleton Rib toward the cliffs."

At the stricken look in the mother's face, Jean turned quickly to her brother-in-law.

"He must have found Kobuk and gone off adventuring again, Shane. . . . But he can't have gone far with the dog so crippled. Perhaps he's picking flowers," she suggested hopefully.

Ellen had started down toward the dilapidated hut

where Loll had surprised the swallows on his first morning exploration. Lying on the doorsill she found some fragrant spikes of late-blooming orchis tied with a grass blade. Calling to the others she picked up the flowers. Boreland answered her with a gesture and after running back into the cabin for his rifle, followed.

"He loved the yellow flowers best, Jean," Ellen said thoughtfully. "Perhaps he has gone to the gulch where they grow thickest."

Toward the steep depression in the hillside some two hundred yards distant the coarse grass of the tundra was flattened in spots as if something had passed that way. The women seized upon this clue and eagerly followed the signs.

Where the land sloped upward toward the hill they came upon a grave. It was old, so old that the Greek cross at the head was moss-grown, broken and decayed. Once before Ellen and her son had stood there, touched with the gentle speculative melancholy that a wilderness grave always brings. Before leaving they had placed a cluster of flowers upon it in memory of the bold Russian sailor of long ago, whose body lay beneath. Now there was a fresh bunch of blossoms at the foot of the cross. . . . At the sight of them quick, hot tears welled up in Ellen's eyes. It hurt her to remember Loll's quaint way of talking to the flowers he had picked.

Boreland, rifle in hand, overtook them just as they entered the gully that ran upward to the flat top of the Island.

During the rainy season the gulch undoubtedly

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cradled a small stream of water but now it was only slightly damp, and on each side, untouched yet by frost, grew a golden profusion of flowers. Here and there freshly broken stems indicated that Ellen had not been amiss in her surmise as to the boy's route.

Halfway up they came upon Loll's cap swinging from a dried celery blossom. With a cry Ellen caught at it and clasped it to her breast while she called his name again and again. Jean joined her; then Boreland took up the name. . . .

There was no answer.

When the voices died away at last it seemed strangely, ominously still in the sunny, flower-scented hollow. . . . With a sickening fear that she might never hear her boy's call again Ellen continued to stand straining her ears for the sound of it. On either side of her a wall of yellow bloom arose, shutting her in. A breath of air stirred the fragrance of it,—clean, sweet. Suddenly, on its scent, there flashed before her baby-pictures from the realm of her mother-memories—Loll, curly-headed, grey-eyed and laughing, holding out chubby arms as he took his first unsteady steps; Loll's plump, diminutive legs, dancing "tippy-toe" with comical baby joyousness before he would consent to be buttoned into his nightie; Loll asleep, his little tousled head on the pillow beside that of "Shut-eye" an absurd and dilapidated doll dear to his infant heart. . . . And once, when she had impatiently slapped his fat little hand as it closed on a forbidden object, Loll's baby face looking up at her with hurt, astonished eyes and quivering chin. . . . This last

thought stabbed her with poignant regret wounding her heart with such anguish and self-reproach and longing that she burst into sobs as she climbed blindly to the top of the gulch.

On the crest of the hill all three stopped for a moment, out of breath from the steep ascent.

Spread out like a vast beautiful meadow the top of the Island lay flat as the palm of a hand. The tundra, softly green and brown, was splashed with the yellow and rose and purple of late-blooming wild flowers. Small brown pools of water bordered with moss were sunk here and there. To the north and east not a tree or bush broke the level but southward the tundra rose gently toward the top of the cliffs a mile or more away, where the air was thick with seabirds. A narrow path, suggestive of heavy padded feet, ran from north to south along the edge of the hill.

Despite this gentleness, this softness of contour characteristic of the tundra meadows of the North, there was a feeling of wind-swept spaces. The air was exquisitely pure. Jean, looking about her, involuntarily drew a deep, long breath. Midway between her and the edge of the distant cliffs stood the one lone tree of Kon Klayu—a small gnarled spruce, its branches all growing from one side of the trunk, bearing mute testimony to the velocity of the prevailing gales. There was about this tree an air of almost human loneliness and—waiting. On the brow of the hill it faced the sea like a woman with long, wind-blown hair. Near it rose a dome-shaped mound like an Eskimo hut in form but many times larger.

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As the girl's eyes followed the trail south she suddenly became aware of a small, slowly-moving object, . . . then another.

"Oh, Ellen!" There was glad relief in her voice. "*There* he is! There they are—Loll and Kobuk! See! Their heads are bobbing just above the grass toward the tree!"

At the first exclamation Boreland had started hurriedly along the trail. The two women followed him calling to the boy as they ran. But Loll, evidently deeply interested in his own small adventures, did not hear their shouts. Kobuk was now hobbling on ahead and despite his bandaged leg, was tacking hither and thither woofing in the manner of the huskie when he wishes to bark. As Loll neared the tree they saw him branch off the trail and a few minutes later disappear around the hummock.

But Kobuk did not follow.

With short staccato woofs he was limping forward toward the crest of the hill and back again. There was a strange note in the sound. Presently he stood still, his long nose raised, wolf-like, as if to catch a scent.

At this point Boreland stopped in the trail.

"El," he said hurriedly, "you and Jean stay right here. I'm going to make a short-cut to the hummock. I'll bring Loll back. Mind what I tell you, *stay* here!"

He started swiftly across the deceptively smooth-looking tundra, his face drawn and ashen. While Jean watched him, he slipped his rifle to the hollow of his arm. The movement brought the thought of

the bear to the girl. Her heart thumped against her side. She glanced at Ellen, but her sister was standing with hand-shaded eyes following the progress of Shane who had covered nearly half the distance to the mound. Jean turned again to the crest of the hill where Kobuk had been. He was hobbling toward her. Even as she looked the dog stopped, glanced behind him, then stiffened, every hair along his neck bristling. He stood as if sniffing the wind which was blowing toward her. Then he came on.

"Kobuk, what's the matter, Kobuk——"

The girl broke off with a gasp of terror. In a fascination of fright her gaze became fastened on a spot beyond the advancing Kobuk.

Out of the bushes that crowned the edge of the hill a great, hairy head was slowly rising. Followed the massive arches of shoulders, the whole powerful body. An instant later the vast bulk of a Kodiak bear, with low-hung swinging head, was outlined against the growth behind. A moment it stood, looming huge, brown, fearful—the most dangerous beast that roams the Alaskan wilderness. Then deliberately it came to its haunches, its immense paws dangling in front, its monstrous head and neck turning from side to side. . . . Dropping to earth again it slouched heavily in the direction of the hummock where Lollie had disappeared.

Jean turned swiftly to see if Boreland were aware of the proximity of the creature, now making for the opening to its den on the other side of the mound—a den which Loll no doubt was at that moment explor-

ing. Her brother-in-law was preparing to spring across one of the little brown pools. . . . Then, to her despair, he stumbled, and one leg went down in the soft muck of the farther edge. As he fell, he tried to throw his rifle to the bank, but the heavy, metal-stayed butt jammed against his hand.

Jean held her breath. For a long moment he did not move. Had he broken his leg? Had he—? She sobbed with relief. He was beginning to struggle out; but, even in her excitement, she noticed that he did not use his right hand. It hung limply from the wrist.

Ellen must have seen the beast as soon as Jean for as her husband fell she was dashing away across the tundra to him. Jean's mind wrestled with the situation. With his right hand useless, Boreland, good shot though he was, could never send the single bullet that must kill the grizzly. They could risk no fight at close range with a wounded and infuriated Kodiak bear. Jean remembered her sister's unusual skill at target practice on the *Hoonah*. Jean herself was a good shot but Ellen could, unfailing, hit a bull's eye at twenty paces, though she could never be persuaded to shoot at a living thing. Would she have the courage, the coolness, to face the monster in that critical moment which meant life or death to her son? Would she *be in time*?

Now the bear had traversed more than half the distance to the hummock and was still lumbering along. She must stop him, must at least delay him—she and Kobuk—so that Ellen might reach the other side of the mound before him.

She ran to meet the dog. Snatches of hunting tales Kayak Bill had told came to her—tales of northern huskies hamstringing wild beasts. She did not know what the term meant, but Kobuk could do it. Kobuk, the powerful, the swift, the beautiful. . . . Then she remembered—Kobuk's right foreleg was crippled and still tightly bandaged. . . . Kobuk crippled stood no chance against a Kodiak bear!

She came up to him. At her approach, as though reinforced by her presence, the dog turned clumsily on three legs to face the beast. Low, savage growls issued from his throat. His lips curled away from his sharp fangs; spasms serrulated his nose; the hair along his spine rose and fell.

Jean patted his side. Sick at heart she urged him forward. She pointed desperately to the monster.

"Mush, Kobuk! Sick 'im, old boy!" She forced enthusiasm into her tones. "Go head him off!"

The dog limped a few feet. He looked back at her, his ferocious look softened. His crippled leg hung useless. He raised clear, questioning eyes to her face.

"Oh, Kobuk, darling, I know—I *know*—" the girl's voice broke. She knelt and threw her arms about him. "But you must do *something*! Kobuk, you must!" She pleaded with him as if he were human.

Once more the dog looked at her, his dark, intelligent eyes fearful and sad. He gave a half-hearted little woof, shifted on his three legs and rested his head a moment against her knee.

She sprang up and ran a short distance ahead of him. Again she pointed to the bear.

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"Mush, Kobuk! Oh, go after him, boy!"

He started. Once more his hair bristled ferociously. Then suddenly, to Jean's dismay, he turned and instead of heading the bear off, began to make a detour behind it. Forgetful of all else but the necessity of delaying the beast, she ran after the dog shouting encouragement.

As he left her behind he gathered speed. He swerved, making straight for the back of the bear. His woofing sounds had ceased now. He was grimly silent. The instincts of his wolf ancestors at the sight of quarry must have awakened in his heart making him forget his bodily pain, for as he sped on in his desire to maim and kill, he put his bandaged leg to the ground with increasing frequency. By the time he reached the animal, gone was the friendly, gentle Kobuk Jean had always known. In his place rushed a new and terrible Kobuk—a snarling, leaping devil-dog, with blazing eyes, white fangs gleaming in a dripping mouth, little ears laid back against a lean, wolf-like head.

He attacked the bear from behind, nipping it slightly. The huge beast stopped and whirled in clumsy astonishment. For a moment it looked almost curiously at the white-fanged fury leaping away. Then turning lumbered on again toward the mound. The monster had lived so long on Kon Klayu undisturbed by man or beast that it was apparently indifferent to both.

But Kobuk, cripple though he was, would not be ignored. Again he dashed at the bear, seeking to nip it from the rear. Again he retreated. Repeating his maneuvers he kept on, until suddenly Jean saw the

beast whirl viciously. Its cumbersome bulk stiffened, its little eyes gleamed with rage. It rose on its hind feet, its monster head swaying from side to side. Then the girl stopped, horrified, dazed at the unequal battle that ensued.

She had a confused memory of a huge upstanding creature laying about it like a fiend with great furry arms. She saw her dog, crippled, but dauntless, ever dodging, wheeling, leaping, circling and attacking from behind the moment the bear's back was toward him. She saw Kobuk catch glancing blows from the mighty claw-barbed paws and roll five feet, ten feet. She saw him battered, bleeding, panting, struggling to his feet again and again to renew his losing fight. Backward and forward over the tundra they fought, swiftly, savagely, yet despite it all ever nearing the mound. Then all in a moment—they disappeared around the edge of the hummock. To the girl it was as if the earth had swallowed them. She stood for a moment bewildered. But remembering, she turned to where she had last seen Ellen and Shane. Her sister was not in sight, but Boreland was limping around the opposite end of the mound. He carried no gun. Then he, too, disappeared. . . . A second later a shot rang out—then another. After that was silence.

The sound of the rifle galvanized the girl into action. With wildly thumping heart she sped toward the scene of the shooting, dreading what she might find there. Rounding the hummock she stopped, staring at the scene before her.

A few feet from the cave-like opening in the hillock,

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lay the great bear dead, but with limbs still twitching. It had been shot fairly through the shoulder and into the heart. Ellen, the rifle at her feet, stood sobbing against her husband's breast. His sound hand patted her back mechanically, but his eyes were fixed on something beyond.

Jean's followed them.

Loll was sitting flat on the ground beside the prostrate body of Kobuk, holding the dog's head on his knees. Kobuk's great dark eyes, swimming in tears of pain, were raised to the child's face, in a look so sad, and withal so full of love that Jean started forward, a cry breaking from her heart. From shoulder to thigh the dog was a bleeding horror where one whole side of his faithful body had been raked by the iron claws of the bear.

"Oh, my Kobuk! My dear doggie!" The little boy sobbed and laid his cheek against Kobuk's head.

The dog moved slightly, and his pink tongue went out weakly to lick his small comrade's face.

"I won't let him hurt you no more now, Kobuk," crooned Lollie, protectingly.

Jean sank on her knees beside him.

"Kobuk — dear old — Kobuk —" she murmured brokenly, stroking a limp, hot paw.

The dog's dimming senses must have caught the sound of his name, for his tail moved feebly as if, with the last beat of his brave heart he was trying to wag goodbye. . . . He lifted his head, . . . a shudder passed through him. Then he lay still, his wide, glazing eyes fixed on the little boy's face.

Jean buried her head in her arms oblivious to everything but the wild grief that shook her. But Lollie, not realizing that Kobuk was dead, sat patting the relaxed bandaged leg, while he whispered childish words of comfort in the unheeding ears.

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE LONE TREE

THAT evening they buried Kobuk on the brow of the hill near the lone tree of Kon Klayu.

At sunset time Loll sat by himself on the cabin steps. His chin was in his hand and his wide, grey eyes were fixed on the clear rose of the western sky. It was the first time that death had come near to him and the mystery and loneliness of it filled him with strange, new thoughts.

For a long time he looked into the fading glow. Then he shook his head slowly, reproachfully.

"God," he said, in the uncanny way he had of seeming to converse with Deity. "God, how can you smile so, when my Kobuk is dead?"

The purple dust of twilight sifted down on land and sea. . . . At last, awed by the unanswerable mystery of life and death, the little questioner turned in to the cabin, where his mother sat sewing in the soft, yellow light of the shaded lamp. . . .

Breakfast the next morning was an event. Harlan had accepted Ellen's invitation to be present, and as he entered the cabin, the air was permeated with the delicious smell of frying steak. With the exception of

ducks the party had eaten no fresh meat for a month before coming to the Island, and the recent daily breakfasts of musty oatmeal and hotcakes was becoming monotonous. Despite the tragedy of Kobuk, it was a grateful family that gathered about the big platter of bear meat and steaming cups of black coffee.

"This ought to tide us over nicely until the *Hoonah* comes," said Boreland helping himself to another piece. "A fine breakfast, El! Upon my word, it couldn't be better if we were in the States. . . . Still—I'd like a bit of butter—real, honest-to-God cow's butter—on my hotcakes!"

"Wall," mumbled Kayak with his mouth full of steak. "Sugar and like sweetenin' hits me where I live. I used to think if they took away my sugar I'd just as lief die. But now that there ain't any, I'm scratchin' along tolerable wall. But—I'd give my hat for somethin' tasty to smear on these here sourdoughs!"

"Go on with you, Kayak! With El's sourdoughs you don't need sweetening." Boreland laughed. "We can use bear fat instead of butter now, for that old devil certainly was fat. We'll try some of it out. Of course we won't need much, for the schooner will be in any day now. We'll smoke part of it and put the rest down in salt." He leaned back in his chair and drew contentedly on his pipe.

"By h-hen, a smoke does taste mighty good after high-toned grub like this," drawled Kayak, surrounding himself with a cloud.

"You men smoke too much," Ellen broke in. "Some-

times I'm convinced that pipes bear the same relation to men that pacifiers do to babies. At the rate you three are going, you'll be out of tobacco in no time. If the *Hoonah* doesn't——"

"Holy mackinaw, El! You're eternally seeing the hole in the doughnut lately!" her husband interrupted somewhat testily. "Of course she will be along right away. No man would leave us on this island long without provisions. It wouldn't be human. And about smoking"—he waved an airy hand—"why I can quit any time I want to and never miss it."

"Same here." Kayak puffed out another tobacco-scented cloud. "I'll tell a man no measly habit ever got a strangle holt on me."

Harlan said nothing.

After breakfast the clean-up from the rockers was panned and freed from sand. Boreland weighed the dust in the new gold scales.

"Four ounces," he announced, as they balanced. "That ought to bring us about sixty dollars. Not bad for one day's work. If we can only find enough of that sand we'll make a stake here, boys. Gad, I wish the *Hoonah* would get here so we could establish ourselves permanently." Boreland had been trying to induce Kayak to remain with him on the Island.

The remainder of the day was spent in getting the bear meat to the cabin and preparing it for preservation. The Indian hut where Loll had surprised the swallows was cleaned out and fitted up as a smoke house. Harlan cut and brought in several back-loads of alder to furnish hard-wood smoke to cure the meat.

The women were busy indoors trying out the fat.

After the fire in the smoke-house had been going some time, Kayak Bill sauntered in with a can full of ashes.

"These here's hard-wood ashes, Lady," he told Ellen. "We ain't got no white man's antiseptic medicine now, and I reckon we better make some o' the Injine kind. Put warm water on these and let 'em stand overnight. You'll have an antiseptic then that'll be a ringtailed wonder, Lady."

As they worked about the house that morning Ellen and Jean discussed the shooting of the bear. It was the sight of the monster tearing her dog from shoulder to thigh that had calmed Ellen. Her fear was swallowed up in a gripping desire for revenge that made it possible for her to take careful aim and fire. Jean knew that Ellen had experienced none of the thrills that come to the hunter of big game. She was a domestic woman, a home maker, thrown by circumstances into situations where she was forced to do things she never dreamed she could do—things she shuddered over afterward. Even as she told of the incident it seemed to both women like a tragic and terrible dream—a dream whose influence would not leave them.

On this day the sisters were heartily sick of life on the Island of Kon Klayu.

Jean's depression continued all day long. The thought of Kobuk never left her. She found herself recalling his friendly, wagging ways; the feel of his muzzle nosing her hand; his soft eyes looking up at

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her from attentive, side-turned head. She found herself regretting that Kobuk was not there to share the fresh meat with them.

Several times during the day she stopped in her work to lift her head, listening. She kept fancying she heard Kobuk's husky woofing. Once she went to the door and looked out to convince herself that he was not there. Down at the smoke-house Lollie, whom she had expected to be loudly inconsolable at the death of the dog, was helping the men. He had his old revolver tied to his waist and was shouting lustily. Jean felt a pang of disappointment in her nephew. She would have had him come to her and talk of the dog. Womanlike, she wanted to comfort him for the loss and in so doing ease her own grief. Kobuk had been her dog and Loll's.

She stepped back into the living-room.

"I suppose it's the nature of the male to forget quickly," she said.

"Forget what?" Ellen asked, the word "male" causing her mind to fly at once to Harlan.

"Oh—nothing."

While the girl was doing up the supper dishes she heard Loll go whistling down the trail. When she had finished she took her violin from its case and stepped out on the porch. Kayak and Boreland were engaged in a close game of double solitaire. Ellen, with a headache, was lying down in Lollie's bunk. Harlan had gone across the Island to his Hut. It was very lonely.

She put down her violin.

"I'm going for a walk, Shane," she called through the open door.

Down past the smoke-house and the Russian sailor's grave she went; then up the gulch that led to the top of the hill. There were no animals to be afraid of now.

On the crest she turned her back on the flat lonesomeness of the tundra and looked down on the wide expanse of ocean spread below. The day was dying in soft flushes of amber and rose and lavender. Life on Kon Klayu was hard, but she never tired of the soothing beauty of its nights.

Her eyes followed the trail to the solitary tree facing the sea like a waiting woman with long, wind-blown hair. In the fading light its human aspect brought a sense of comfort to the girl. It made Kobuk's grave seem less lonely. She wished Loll were with her, she would go then and see how the men had left him. Poor Kobuk, with his dear, friendly ways! Everyone but her seemed to have forgotten him today—even Loll. Suddenly she decided she would go by herself.

She was startled by the sound of a step behind her. Glancing over her shoulder she saw Gregg Harlan coming from the north along the bear trail that skirted the bushes at the edge of the hill. She waited for him.

"I was headed for there, too," he said simply, indicating the tree down the trail.

They walked silently in single file along the narrow path. The sweetness of a long sunny day came up from the grass that brushed Jean's skirts. For many minutes the new mound they were approaching was screened by the tall growth, but when they saw it,

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Jean stopped abruptly, her finger on her lips. From the grave came to them a muffled sound.

Loll was there before them.

The little fellow, oblivious to everything but his loneliness and his loss, lay across the fresh turned earth. His bare head was buried in his outflung arms. One hand fiercely clutched a few bruised flowers and his small body shook with long, slow sobs.

Jean's throat tightened and tears of sympathy flooded her eyes. With outstretched arms she started impulsively forward to comfort him, but before she had taken a second step Harlan laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Not now," he whispered. "Come."

He drew back along the trail. Wondering, she followed until they were out of earshot.

"We'll wait for him here at the top of the gulch, Jean." It was the first time he had called her that. Each was aware of a sudden, warming sense of comradeship—a sense of sharing something tender, sad.

They sat down on the crest of the hill, so close that only a single tundra daisy nodded between them in the deepening twilight.

"Why—why did you do that, Gregg?"

He did not answer at once. . . . Up from the sea came the susurrous voice of the reef whispering its eternal questions.

"Because—men, real men, bear their griefs silently, and alone," he said at last. "It is their way."

Jean thought of the little fellow, so childish in many ways, but silent all day on the subject of his loss. He

had gone to cry out his grief, unseen, on Kobuk's grave. . . . Suddenly she loved him with a tenderness she had never known before, but . . . with it came a new loneliness. It was as if already his boyish hand and shut her, a woman, from that place in his heart that only men might know and understand.

She rested her elbows on her knees and cupped her chin in her hands.

"Oh—o—o," she said, reflectively. "I did not know. I did not dream . . . men were like that." . . . The hearts of men . . . it was strangely sweet to know what lay hidden in the hearts of men.

The faint, disembodied cry of a seabird keened across the dusk. Formless waters stretched away into the wide, beckoning dimness. The twilight wind was pungent with the strange awakening smell of the sea. Forgotten now was the depression of the day; it had no place in the romance, the mystery, the promise of the northern night. She became suddenly conscious that there was something sublimely beautiful in life that she had never yet experienced, something that unknowingly she had been waiting for; something that must come to her at last. . . . She wondered if the young man sitting so close to her were ever stirred by such rapturous, intangible thoughts. With quickened interest she turned to look at him, and met his deep eyes intent on her face.

Somewhat confused, he snapped off the head of the daisy between them.

"I—I was just wondering what you were thinking about, Jean."

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"I was thinking about you," she answered candidly. "I was wondering——"

There came the sound of little running feet on the trail near them, and the girl rose hastily, calling Loll's name.

"Don't be afraid, honey. It's I—Jean!"

Breathless but relieved at the sight of them, the boy joined them and the three went slowly down the gulch toward the cabin.

Before the porch Harlan stopped.

"No, I won't go in now," he said in answer to her question.

They stood a moment, a sudden shy silence falling upon them. . . .

"Good-night, Jean." Slim and tall, he stood looking down at her holding out his hand. Hers went out to meet it and the pressure of his strong, slender fingers sent a thrill to her heart. She was stirred by the magic of his nearness.

"Good . . . night," she whispered wonderingly. She longed to linger there in the dusk with him, but—because of her desire—she turned and ran up the steps to the cabin. . . .

Ten minutes later she stood in the twilight on the bank below the cabin. The sea, the night, the world seemed to hold out loving arms to her. A feeling tremulously new and enchanting had come to her. . . . She tucked her violin beneath her chin and drew her bow softly across the strings. This night she could play as she had never played before. This night she *must* play.

The music floated up through the dusk with dreamy,

questioning sweetness. . . . Time slipped by. . . . At last she drifted into the notes of her good-night. She felt that there was a special tenderness in the chords from her long-drawn singing bow tonight. Lost in the harmony of her own creating she hardly knew when the voice—his voice from the hilltop, took up the strain. So softly was it done that she was unsurprised. The words came down to her now clear, mellow, thrillingly masculine, and—did she only imagine there was something personal in them?

“In the West

Sable night lulls the day on her breast.

Sweet, good-night! . . . Love, good-night!”

CHAPTER XXIII

ELLEN

THE days passed. They were growing noticeably shorter now and provisions were getting low. The trail up the steep hillside behind the cabin became hardened by the feet of the watchers alert for the hourly expected arrival of the *Hoonah*. At the top which they all had come to call the Lookout, every hour of the day found some one of the party anxiously scanning the ocean toward Katleean.

Many cannery steamers and whalers on their way south were sighted, but all gave the Island a wide berth. The hundred reefs of Kon Klayu had no lure for sailors of the North Pacific.

Boreland, who never failed to patrol the beach daily, found one more patch of ruby sand, which the three men rocked out. He weighed the gold after the clean-up.

"This sand is richer than the other batch, El!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

For a moment Ellen eyed the yellow gleam of the dust without interest, then she leaned over and dipped her fingers into the golden flakes, letting them fall slowly back into the scales.

"Shane, Shane"—she turned away and patted his arm maternally—"you are like a little boy playing with wooden money." What value had gold on the Island of Kon Klayu, she thought, where it could not buy an ounce of food?

To Ellen Boreland these were days of anguished conjecture, of harassed indecision. As they passed with no sign of the *Hoonah* she began to recall her last week at Katleean. On the screen of her mind appeared over and over again the White Chief's dark face, in her ears the voice of memory repeated his softly-spoken, enigmatic words: "Remember . . . you'll want me. . . . The pigeon loose, comes back . . . I will understand."

The *Hoonah* was overdue. . . . Was this then what he had meant? Was he now holding the schooner believing that in her anxiety for the safety of her loved ones she would release the bird? Was he trying to force her, at such a cost, to buy from him the lives of those dear to her? . . . Had he planned this thing from the beginning? Was he even now at the post waiting—certain that eventually she must release the pigeon? The picture unnerved her to the point of panic. And yet she tried to reassure herself. No man, however cruel and pitiless, could deliberately plan so monstrous a thing. She tried to find excuses for the non-arrival of the *Hoonah*. . . . Perhaps the fall steamer had not come in on time. . . . Perhaps some accident had happened and the White Chief was having the schooner repaired. Surely he would come, if only to ascertain the fate of his bookkeeper for whose

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safety Silvertip must account. But Silvertip—had the Swede told the truth? Might he not have said that young Harlan had preferred to stay behind and had been safely landed with the party? Then it occurred to her with a fearful knowledge that to the White Chief of Katleean the life of a man meant nothing.

While she went about her household duties there came to her again and again the sound of the white trader's sardonic: "I have presented your *son* with a pigeon." Not to her, nor to Jean had he given the bird, but deliberately he had made a present of it to her little boy that Loll might innocently love and care for the thing designed to be the symbol of his mother's shame!

To her harassed mind the bird came to have a hideous vitality. There was something uncanny in the way it thrived in its captivity—as though it fed on her distress. And almost like a conspiracy was the determination of her loved ones to preserve it. Loll was devoted to it, especially now since the death of Kobuk; it was his only playmate. Shane was particularly zealous in his care of it, exercising the bird by means of a long string, since Loll would permit no one to clip its wings. Even Kayak Bill was always bringing it green stuff to supplement its diet of rolled oats. Only Jean appeared indifferent to the bird—Jean, always tender of dumb things. She had remarked, once, that its smoke-grey color reminded her unpleasantly of the eyes of the White Chief.

Sometimes, in a kind of fury, Ellen wondered if the pigeon bore a charmed life—if it *could* not die! Dead,

her problem would be solved for her. . . . Yet she dared not let it die. . . not while there was a chance—! Standing before the cage day after day, Ellen would torment herself with a thought. If she should leave the door unlatched, so that it would jar open . . . if, of its own accord, the bird should fly away! Then, when the White Chief came she could disclaim all knowledge of its going. . . . But there was the lock of her hair, about which she had lied to her husband. It was still in possession of the trader who, secure in his power over everyone in his wilderness kingdom, was capable of any melodramatic folly, of any false tale. And Shane, hot-headed, protective—she shuddered. In her overwrought imagination she saw her husband's hands stained with another man's blood. . . . No, the bird was a kind of *thing* fastened upon her which she could not, must not in all conscience lose.

Torn by these conflicting emotions and sick with foreboding, she would turn away from the cage. Tomorrow—she would wait until tomorrow. Perhaps the *Hoonah* would come tomorrow. Perhaps it was even in sight now! With hope and longing so intense that it bordered on despair she would leave the cabin and climb to the Lookout to scan the empty sea.

One sunny afternoon she was standing there alone watching a dark streak of steamer-smoke move slowly southward. Below her, stretching away to the wide horizon lay the sea, its great, smooth swells heaving jade-green in the sunlight. Autumn color lay over the tundra moss, the rice-grass, the short alder bushes. Autumn, a soothing autumn was in the air, promising

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the northern world of growing things a long, snow-enfolded peace; but herself and her little family—what?

For some time she had half-consciously been aware of a strange encircling hush. She looked about her and realized that nowhere was a seabird of any kind. Then far out, a dark mass like a fallen cloud, challenged her attention. Even as she wondered it rose into the air and began to advance swiftly toward her, . . . it resolved itself into thousands of small black birds.

"The sea-parrots!" Ellen spoke aloud in her surprise. "They must be going south." She had not known that this would happen. She felt a dull regret that it should be so.

With crimson beaks pointed south they came nearer and nearer, until, flying directly overhead, they cast a shadow as if a cloud had passed over the sun. The sky was black with them. Noiseless on the wing, there was something ominous in the sea-parrot's silence during the quarter of an hour in which they flew steadfastly over the island on their course. Ellen watched them with an interest divided between wonder and awe.

Before they had passed an increasing wild chorus came to her ears. She turned to face the north again where another cloud—grey-white—was coming. She knew it to be composed of her noisiest neighbors, the gulls, bound also for southern shores.

Over the island these birds sailed with gay squawkings, their wide wings seeming to wave a contemptuous good-bye. It was as if they scorned, yet pitied the human creature *below* who must stay behind because she had no wings to bear her away.

The last call dimmed and died. Despite the lazy swash of the swells on the beach below the sunny afternoon was heavy with silence. Ellen's eyes swept the vast circle of the distance. The smoke of the south-bound steamer was no more. Far down the tundra toward the cliffs stood the one lone tree of Kon Klayu facing the sea like a waiting woman with long, wind-blown hair. . . . An appalling sense of loneliness flooded Ellen. A sudden, overwhelming need for human companionship swept her. . . . She turned hastily into the trail that led down to the cabin—then checked herself, as the sound of some one whistling came to her. She glanced back.

Walking briskly toward her along the tundra trail that led from his Hut to the Lookout came Gregg Harlan. He must recently have borrowed Shane's razor, for the soft, dark beard that had shadowed his face was gone. Bareheaded, he advanced swingingly, vigorously, his chin up, his whole figure the personification of youth, confidence, and a new strength. For the first time Ellen was glad to see him.

As she waited for him to approach she studied him with interest. He had changed much since his landing on Kon Klayu. Under the rigors of hardship, of physical labor, of abstinence, he had developed a clean-cut masculinity that was strangely reassuring. She remembered how unconsciously, during these past weeks, she had turned to him for the steadiness which others had lacked; how instinctively she had counted on him for a perception of the little things, the smaller needs, which are so often the greater ones. After all,

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she reminded herself, in the day by day stresses of life, it was this gift of understanding, of sympathy with the innate needs, that counted so tremendously.

She pictured Jean, with her warm emotions, her love of the finer beauties of life, thrown into the rough and changing currents of existence as the wife of a man older, sturdier, perhaps, than Gregg, but without his steadier gentleness. Ellen shrank instinctively from the thought. And Gregg had changed—of that there was no doubt. There was no longer a sign of his old subservience to the poisonous brew of Katlean; instead there was every evidence that he was not another man, but in a greater, stronger way, the man he had once been.

After all, Ellen thought, who was she to determine for Jean the sort of man the girl should choose—she who had permitted herself compromising entanglements with such a one as the White Chief! With Gregg Jean was safer at that moment than was she in her own tragic situation—safer and cleaner in her motives! . . . With something of appeal for the steadying power of his friendship in her need, whose eventualities would be as vital to Jean as to herself, Ellen turned with a new warmth in her manner to greet the young man. Discussing the phenomenon of the bird migration, she went with him down the trail to the cabin.

As they approached the house Lollie came rushing up from the beach, holding something tightly in his little hand. He was shouting excitedly and at his urging the family gathered curiously around him to

find themselves electrified at the disclosure of what the youngster held. It was a nugget, fully an ounce in weight! He had found it, he explained, on the bed-rock below Bear Paw Lake.

Boreland went off immediately to prospect with Kayak Bill and Harlan. Contrary to all previous experience, this gold had not been uncovered by a storm—there had been no storm. Then there must be a place where the yellow metal lay otherwise revealed. Somewhere on the Island must be a mine of gold. Harlan, who had spent an inattentive year at a school of mines before he was requested to leave, began to take an interest in the situation.

Shane returned that night long after the others, without having found another sign. Nor was he any more successful, when day after day he continued to patrol the beaches, though his faith in the sands of Kon Klayu remained unshaken.

Ellen and he were returning one afternoon, from Sketleton Rib where they had gone to look for pay-sand. He had recovered the use of his sprained wrist and had brought along the shotgun. Opposite the little lake in this vicinity they turned in from the beach. A drizzling rain had begun to fall. The dead yellow grass lay flat on the ground. The bare brown branches of the alders were hung with globules of water which fell, wetting Ellen as she brushed through them. Out on the lake she caught glimpses of a flock of belated mallards, but since there was now no upstanding vegetation it was difficult for the hunters to hide their approach. Crouching low behind an alder Ellen

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watched Shane creep up within shooting range. Since the gun was an old thing held together by copper wire, and went off at the slightest jar it was impossible to carry it loaded. Shane paused, inserted the shells, raised the piece and took careful aim. There came a loud report, a whirr of wings, and the next instant Shane fell backward, one hand flung upward to his head.

Ellen sprang to where he lay motionless, blood streaming down one side of his face. Even in her anguish she noted that the gun barrels had burst from the force of overloaded shells. Swiftly she plunged her handkerchief into the water and uttering incoherent entreaties and endearing names, began to bathe his face which already was beginning to swell.

For what seemed a long time Shane did not move. Frantically she tore a strip from her lawn chemise and bound up his head to stop the flow of blood. Then with all her strength she sought to raise him from the grass. His head fell limply back exposing his bare brown throat to the falling rain.

"Shane . . . Shane . . . O, help me, dear! Please!" Cold fear gripped her and made her voice tremble. She struggled once more to raise his heavy body. She was unable to lift him. Calling him, imploring him, she tried again and again, until at last he sat up slowly, groaning and putting both hands to the bloody bandage about his head.

"Come, dear—" her voice broke as her shaking hands tried to assist him. "We must go home, Shane. Come now." As if he were a child she coaxed and

encouraged the stunned man until he rose painfully, swayed, and steadied himself against her. After a lurching step or two he managed to keep his feet and in silence that struck to her heart, he suffered her to lead him along through the soft, drizzling rain.

Ellen found only Harlan at the cabin. Without a question the young man sprang to her assistance. He helped Shane into the house and to bed.

The last of the antiseptic had been used for Kobuk. Ellen ran for the clear water from the hard-wood ashes—the Indian antiseptic which Kayak Bill had induced her to make, and while she held the basin Harlan washed the blood from her husband's face. The sight of the wound sickened her. Just below Shane's right eye was a livid gash two inches long.

What could she do? In some way stitches must be taken to draw the edges together, but how? She had nothing but ordinary needles and thread. She blamed herself bitterly for leaving Katleean without a medicine chest. A moment she thought of that one, ordered from the States, which was to arrive on the *Hoonah*. Then again she set her mind to the solution of the problem before her. . . . It came to her in a flash, one of Kayak Bill's tales of an Eskimo woman's ingenuity!

"Gregg!" She spoke firmly. "Hand me the scissors." She took the hairpins from her hair and it fell in a heavy coil to her waist. Harlan eyed her as though he feared she had suddenly gone insane when she cut a strand of hair and held it up to him.

"We'll boil this and some needles, Gregg," she con-

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tinued quietly, "and when they are sterilized you must help me put the stitches in this wound." . . .

Half an hour later it was over. Shane lay back on his pillow. Ellen watched beside him stroking his hand which lay twitching on the coverlet. Something in the outline of her husband's long, still body under the blankets chilled her with foreboding. Heretofore the thought of hunger only had been with her. Now, should sickness or further accidents come upon them . . . Should Shane develop blood-poisoning . . .

Like one doomed Ellen's eyes sought the wall calendar. NOVEMBER 1 met her gaze with the force of a blow. The *Hoonah* was already two weeks overdue!

Suddenly she bent and rested her head against the blankets, pressing her quivering lips fiercely, passionately against her husband's thin hand.

Tomorrow . . . Tomorrow she must—she *would* release the pigeon!

CHAPTER XXIV

MAROONED

SIX hours later Kon Klayu was cowering in the blasts of the most terrific storm yet experienced by the adventurers. The fearful velocity of the wind and rain made it impossible for Kayak Bill to keep his tent erected, and in the middle of the night he was forced to move his bedding into Jean's and Lollie's room, where the sisters helped him screen himself off by tacking up a tarpaulin.

After Jean had slipped back into her bunk she was surprised to hear her sister discussing, almost wildly she thought, the possibility of a bird's flying against such a gale; and after everyone else had settled down again for the night she could hear Ellen pacing the floor of the living-room. Poor Ellen, thought the girl, she was all unstrung over Shane's accident and frightened at the thought of blood poisoning.

But Shane was feeling much better next morning, though he kept to his bed all day and for several days after. He was unusually silent, realizing, perhaps for the first time, the gravity of the situation, for the storm did not blow itself out in three or six days, as storms had always done before. It lasted twelve days and increased in violence until near the end.

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During this great gale Jean sought her bunk early each evening and lay there between sleep and wakefulness listening to the wind and sea. She was thankful that this was not a snow storm, since snowfall on Kon Klayu did not come until later, owing to the proximity of the Japan Current, but she found herself concerned for Harlan alone in his Hut on the other side of the Island. When it became apparent that Shane's cut was healing as it should, the girl found her thoughts lingering on Gregg. She missed him more than she cared to admit, even to herself.

Before Shane's accident with the shotgun it had fallen to Gregg's lot to hunt the ducks and geese which were by now an important part of their food. There was little ammunition and every shot must be made to tell. With the make-shift shotgun it was impossible to hit anything on the wing, and though it was evident that Harlan's sporting instincts revolted against slipping up and pot-shooting birds on the water, the scarcity of shells compelled him to do it. Kayak Bill flatly refused to handle anything but his .45, confessing to a casual scorn for what he termed a "shootin' iron that spewed its durned in'ards all over the range." In the growing anxiety over the non-arrival of the *Hoonah*, Ellen had relaxed somewhat, her vigilant attitude toward Harlan, and so Jean had come to join the young man on his hunting expeditions.

Recalling them now she glowed at the memory of those past October mornings, when, leaving the rest of the family sleeping she had slipped out of the cabin and met the waiting hunter. She had grown to love the

hunt—the early sun sparkling on the yellow of frost-coated grass, the green of the ocean, the tonic of the sea air, and the swift, never-to-be-forgotten *creak-creak-creak* of flying wings close overhead. There was a thrill in the cautious creeping toward the lake wreathed in the gossamer mists of the autumn morning, and the wriggling through the stiffened yellow grass, and a pang of delighted wonder at coming so close to the wild, winged things, squattering and making soft duck-chatterings in the shadow of the reeds.

But duck-hunting days were over now, she reminded herself regretfully. The shotgun was useless.

Shane's wound continued to heal without complications, but still after everyone else had long been in bed, Jean could hear Ellen pacing the floor nearly every night. This increased the uneasiness that had been growing upon the girl. She wished Ellen would confide more in her. She was finding it very hard for her to understand her sister these days. Ellen had not been herself for weeks. The girl recalled her curious and changeable attitude toward the pigeon the White Chief had given Loll. From at first ignoring it, Ellen had suddenly begun to manifest a lively interest in its welfare. The best of the rolled oats went to feed it. Owing to the occasional frosts Ellen had moved the cage into the shed and she herself had solicitously covered it nightly with an old blanket. Sometimes she had stood for ten minutes at a time looking in at the smoke-grey bird.

One incident stood out clearly in Jean's mind. She had come upon Ellen musing thus beside the cage. Her

sister had just washed her hair and it hung about her shoulders in lovely, golden-brown profusion. There was a look on her face—Jean, thinking of it, shook her head to banish the memory of that look. Presently Ellen had reached up and with a trembling hand gathered together the short tresses that marked the place where she had—foolishly, Jean thought—cut off the lock of hair in Katleean. Ellen's fingers slipped over the severed ends, then flattened themselves forcibly over the latch on the pigeon's cage. "No! No!" Passionately the words had escaped her as she turned her back on the cage. Meeting Jean's questioning eyes she had flushed and gone on into the house without speaking.

Always, at night, as Jean lay thinking, this incident drifted with curious insistency through her mind.

As the storm continued through dreary days, blowing always from the southwest, the strange, reverberating roll from the south cliffs came more loudly than ever before. Listening to it sometimes, Jean would shiver at the hint of the supernatural in its cadence.

The continual thundering of the surf on the beach and the trembling of the cabin in the rainy blasts of the gale finally began to tell on the nerves of those confined in such small quarters. Gradually the talk at the table grew less. Even Kayak Bill ceased his monologues. He and Shane smoked more than ever and buried themselves in the reading of the old magazines and papers. Ellen seemed more affected than any of them. Her face had become drawn and haggard. She was so inattentive to Loll's questions

when the daily lessons were in progress that the little boy grew impatient and asked Jean to help him instead. Then, too, Ellen's strange solicitude for the pigeon increased until it was with difficulty that Shane could prevent her bringing the bird into the cabin during the gale.

One night Jean woke from a troubled doze. Everywhere was a strange, arresting stillness. She realized in a moment that the wind had gone down. The roar of the breakers which had been so loud and constant, now sounded muffled. Her first feeling was one of intense happiness and relief. The storm was over at last—the longest storm she had ever known. Surely, *now*, she thought, the *Hoonah* would come.

Though she knew it must be after midnight there was a murmur of voices in the living-room. A chair scraped along the floor. Then came Kayak Bill's tones, distinctly and with a gravity that sent a chill through her. He was evidently concluding some argument.

"But I'm a-tellin' you, Boreland, that there's nary a Injine or a white on the Alasky coast that'll venture nigh the Island o' Kon Klayu after November first——"

"Great God, Kayak!" Boreland's protest cut him short. "Kilbuck *knows* we haven't enough grub for the winter! He wouldn't leave us here to starve, especially two women and a child, after he has put us here himself! He's *promised* to bring us provisions! Given us his word! To go back on it would be a violation of the law of the cache! Why, the man has my

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schooner, and he hasn't paid for her yet! No, no, Kayak. Kilbuck will come. . . . By God, he's *got* to come!"

There was slow finality in Kayak Bill's answer.

"Boreland, he's waited too long. He *can't* come. It's the thirteenth o' November. No one can come to Kon Klayu now till the breakup o' the winter. . . . The White Chief's staked the cards on us, son. We're up against it."

PART III



CHAPTER XXV

ON RATIONS

AFTER the great November storm was over, Ellen realized that her problem—for the present—had been taken out of her hands. Even if the pigeon were sent now, the White Chief would not risk bringing a schooner to the Island of Kon Klayu; there was no boat built that could make a landing on its reef-guarded shores during the winter season. It was too late. They were marooned until spring at least. She would keep the bird until then. Further than that she refused to think.

As she accepted the inevitable she felt a sense of peace settle upon her, and with it came new strength. As Kayak had said they were up against it, and knowing now what she had to fight, she was ready.

Her mind turned at once to the pitifully meager supply of provisions. With all the shrewdness of a general preparing to withstand an indeterminate siege, she planned her rations so that they might last the longest period of time. If the party could exist until spring, a cannery boat, a whaler, a ship of adventure, might call in and get them, even though the White Chief did not come. Ellen made a mental vow that they *would* live until spring.

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On the fourteenth of November she made the entry in her log :

We have the following provisions on hand :
Flour—damaged—enough for eight months
Bacon, 1 slab
Dried onions, 1 pound
Beans, enough for five months if we have them once
 a week
Rice—damaged—for five months, once a week
Lemon Extract, 1 bottle
Salt and Pepper
Worcestershire sauce, 1 bottle
Dried bear meat
Bear fat, rancid
Rolled oats—mouldy—four months
Tea and Coffee
Three boxes candles
Two jars canned plums from mother's

That afternoon, on a pretense of his looking for pay-sand, she sent Loll down on the beach, and, calling the others together, summed up the problem that confronted them. She read her list of provisions and set forth her plan of rations. In conclusion she urged that each one take a turn hunting for sea-food on the rocks and stranded fish on the beach. If they could supplement their ration thus, they might, by confining themselves strictly to it, exist until some boat came in the spring. Harlan, she decided, must take his meals at the cabin.

“Jean and I will begin gathering shellfish tomorrow, while you men start to lay in a supply of firewood for

the winter months," she finished. Even Shane agreed that existence, now, instead of gold, was their main concern on the Island of Kon Klayu, although his was the logic which still insisted that their desertion by Kilbuck could not be true simply because it seemed so intolerable.

Strange to say, after this frank facing of their difficulties every one of the party felt more cheerful. There came a letting down of the tension, a relaxation of the nerves, which had made their storm-bound days so trying.

The following morning found Ellen and her sister in hip rubber boots belonging to their men, headed for Sunset Point. They were equipped with pails and case knives.

The sun shone bright although there was little warmth in it. The air was sharp and exhilarating and wonderfully pure after the great wind. The thunder of surf on a hundred reefs spoke of the storm of yesterday.

They soon found themselves down among the great boulders amid tangles of brown seaweed, where the shallow pools left by the outgoing tide were alive with strange and interesting sea life. Here, more than in any other place on Kon Klayu they were conscious of the air, the sound, the whole enchanting spell of the sea. The bottoms of tiny sea-pools were dotted with red and yellow starfish. Entrancing rose and purple sea-anemones blossomed like thistles on the water-covered stones but at a touch, a sound, folded their delicate beauties into tight buttons hardly to be distinguished

from the base to which they clung. Comical, tiny iridescent fish, with eyes of bulging astonishment, and thorns on their backs, darted about the women's feet and went into hiding under floating russet seaweed. The big boots lumbering into the shallow water caused sea-eggs of green and lavender to move solemnly on the bottom with raylike prickles erect.

"We'll try the sea-eggs later on," Ellen said, as she watched them. "Senott told me at Katleean that all natives eat them."

The boulders were encrusted with great, grey, open-mouthed barnacles. Periwinkles, like tiny purple snails, clustered on the weeds. These were so numerous that the sisters could not step without crushing them. The crunching sound at first filled Ellen with repugnance for her task, but necessity forced her on and before she had filled her pail with them she had become accustomed to it.

As they moved farther out to where the waves of the ebb tide were creaming against the rocks, the dark seamed sides were painted a delicate sea-pink by a lichen-like growth. Above their heads these boulders rose and all about them was the soft, seeping sound that sea things make when the tide is low.

Kayak Bill had often described what he called a "gumboot," remarking that the name was bestowed locally because of the toughness of this aquatic animal when cooked. From the old man's description Ellen had thought they might be limpets. Since there were no clams on the beach of Kon Klayu she had concluded to try them.

Now, suddenly, she came upon them, their cone-shaped shells adhering to the rocks. When she and Jean tried to pick the small creatures from their abiding places, the least touch or sound caused them to tighten to the boulders. It was impossible then to dislodge them without smashing the shell.

"We'll have to sneak up on them, El," whispered Jean, suiting her actions to her words, and with a sudden, swift movement sweeping half a dozen from their support. It was then that the sisters began to experience the thrill of anticipation, the fascination of uncertainty, that comes to those forced to hunt their food in wild places.

The tide came in flooding the pools in which they were standing and warning them that it was time to leave. With full pails they hastened to the cabin eager to try their new food.

Periwinkles, boiled, had not an unpleasant taste, but because of their likeness to worms, neither of the women could eat them. It fell to little Loll to extract them from their small shells by means of a pin. This was a slow process and after the novelty wore off, the youngster gave utterance to loud lamentations over Kayak Bill's fondness for periwinkles.

The "gumboots" were also boiled, and found to be as rubbery as the name implied. Chopping them fine Ellen made a hash of bread crumbs and fried the mixture in bear fat. Afterward she sometimes added a small bit of chopped bacon, considered a rare treat since the bacon was hoarded for flavoring beans which they were permitted but once a week.

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In putting her family on rations Ellen noticed that each one's appetite increased tremendously. Only by exercising the most rigid self-control could she keep herself to the portions she had allotted. The sight of Lollie scraping his plate for the last morsel of food and then looking up at her expectantly, was the hardest thing she had to bear. She soon began, surreptitiously, to put aside a portion of her daily share for him.

For a time food was the all-absorbing topic of conversation. The men found a certain grim amusement in sitting about the table talking of the kind of "grub" they would order if they were in the States. They could go into such detail as to taste and smell of certain appetizing dishes eaten in the past that often Jean laughingly stopped them.

"By Jove!" Harlan would say. "I know a little place in San Francisco where you can get a beefsteak Bordelaise that would *actually* . . ."

"Um-m, yes," Shane would follow, "and don't you remember that little Italian dump on Columbus where they serve spaghetti with a gooey stuff filled with chicken livers and mushrooms—Oh . . . man!"

"One time up on the Kuskokwim I snared me a cut-throat," Kayak Bill would drawl, and then, with an angler's delight, proceed to describe every wiggle of that super-fish until he landed it, and every phase of camp-fire cooking, until, crisp and bacon-garnished, he ate it from the frying-pan.

Jean's longing for fruit, especially bananas, was so intense that she used to wake up at night thinking about them. She dreamed of bananas smothered in

cream. When she closed her eyes sometimes during the day, bunches of the yellow fruit dangled enticingly in her mental vision. She tried to re-read *Pickwick Papers*. The hungry Fat Boy at first appealed to her, but Dickens' masterly descriptions of the nourishing food of old England filled her with such a hunger that she put the book aside.

December proved to be a month of snow and blizzards, but despite the faithful patrolling of the beach nothing in the way of pay-sand came to light. Whenever the weather permitted everyone sought shellfish among the rocks, as it had become necessary to gather a quantity sufficient to last during storms. The prickly sea-eggs were now added to the fare. Often however, when the wet snow was hurled unceasingly against the windows for days, the supply of sea-food gave out. Then, for hours, there was hunger in the little cabin on Kon Klayu.

Jean noticed that her nephew, in some manner, had come to know that it distressed his mother to speak of being hungry after he had eaten what she had to give him. It was seldom now that he mentioned it. His little mind appeared to be taken up with speculations as to Christmas.

Jean had often listened to Kayak Bill prefacing his tales with: "I'm a-tellin' o' you, you never can tell a speck about a man till you 'cabin' with him a-durin' o' one winter." She was beginning to understand what the old man meant by it now. She was growing to appreciate Shane's irrepressible Irish cheerfulness that always rose above hunger, accident and the nerve-

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trying confinement of the cabin in stormy weather. Because of him the storm-bound hours, despite the food situation, were for the most part, times of story telling and exchange of reminiscences. For Shane, with a strange faith, still clung to the thought that the White Chief might bring the *Hoonah* to the Island before the end of the year.

As Christmas drew nearer, however, with one storm succeeding another, a change came over him. He began to sit beside the table in silence, his head in his hands, his brown eyes looking off into space.

One night when the house trembled in the grip of a blizzard and the unexplained reverberating sound from the south cliffs came louder than usual, he sat thus while Kayak Bill played a game of solitaire on the opposite side of the table. Lollie had established himself in his mother's bed. While he turned the pages of a fairy tale book, he pointed out the pictures to Jean. That day there had been no shellfish to supplement the scanty allowance of food and the little fellow lingered hungrily on the colored pictures depicting bountiful tables of feasting kings; jolly fat cooks basting roasting ducks in the kitchens of queens; little Jack Horner pulled a ripe plum from a pie. Finally he turned a page which disclosed the Queen of Hearts holding out a pan of delicious, brownly-crusted tarts. The crimson jelly at the centers seemed almost to quiver.

"Oh, mother, mother, I'm *so hungry!*" he burst out.

Ellen laid aside her sewing and going to the cupboard brought out a tiny dish of rice and gave it to

him. Jean saw Boreland's eyes follow the movements of his wife. She wondered if he, like herself, suspected that the dish contained over half Ellen's portion for that day. There was a tenseness about his jaw, a smouldering light in his eye that sent a queer chill over the girl. A few minutes later he rose and climbed up into the loft. When he descended he held a revolver in his hand.

The weapon was one he had carried since boyhood. Its history belonged to an oldtime Indian scout, a friend of Boreland's father. On its handle were three notches. The last time the girl had heard the story of those three notches was at Katleean when Shane, pointing them out to the White Chief, had told him that each one stood for a man who deserved and met death at the hand that held the gun.

She grew inattentive to the questions of Loll as she watched her brother-in-law at the table oiling and polishing the old revolver. He spent much time at his task and when it was finished sat thoughtfully, his thin fingers slowly passing over the notches as if he were counting them for the first time. After some minutes he leaned across to Kayak Bill.

"Kayak," he said so softly that the girl could scarcely hear, "*if I get back to Katleean in the spring—there will be four—*" He tapped the notched handle of the revolver significantly.

A sudden chill of foreboding, doubly terrible because at first so vague and incomprehensible, swept her. She saw Kayak's eyes looking into Boreland's. They were tense, half-closed and glittered coldly, not at Shane,

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but at some vision induced by Shane's words. Then the old man nodded twice, slowly, approvingly, decisively. . . .

As the days of December went by everyone on the Island, with the exception of Loll, asserted often that of course there could be no Christmas. Despite this, however, as the date drew near the holiday spirit hovered persistently over the camp. Mysterious things were going on. Kayak Bill withdrew himself behind his curtain very early each day, and tantalizing sounds of whittling came from his corner; while Boreland and Harlan shut themselves up for hours in the shed.

The day before Christmas came white and still with great soft snowflakes falling until noon.

"Santa Claus weather! Santa Claus weather!" sang Lollie dancing up and down before the window. "He'll surely come now—if there is one," he added for Jean's benefit. The girl had tried to explain the spirit of Christmas to the youngster, but he still clung to his early conception of the good old saint.

There was a party that night on Kon Klayu. Jean had never admired her sister more than when she saw Ellen rise above the haunting fear of starvation and with the few pitiful things at her command create the cheer of Christmas Eve. And there was no lack of presents—home-made gifts that had cost their donors much thought and hours of labor—gifts, some of them smile-provoking, but bringing with them a sense of warmer friendliness, a touch of tenderness which enhances the spirit of fellowship that comes to those who share the hazards and adventures of the North.

Loll, with one lump of hoarded sugar, two full-rigged schooners, an Indian war canoe and a new blouse sewed by Ellen's fingers, was supremely happy. For the men were mittens made of a blanket, scarves knitted from the unraveled yarn of two old sweaters, and—even on Kon Klayu the male members could not escape the inevitable Christmas neck-tie, for Ellen had produced from the bottom of her trunk three brand new ones purchased for Shane before she sailed from the States.

Kayak Bill looked his over a few minutes and then disappeared behind his tarpaulin-screen in the next room. When he emerged it was with one hand holding aside his bushy beard. The new neck-tie, impaled with a large nugget pin, hung low on his blue flannel shirt.

"I ain't wore one o' these dude halters for ten yars, Lady," he drawled, hitching his shoulders with an air of being pleased with himself, "but I ain't forgot how they goes."

There were two beautiful caps for Ellen and Jean made of the iridescent necks of mallard drakes, carefully prepared and sewed by Kayak; a dust-pan made of a kerosene can; a calendar ruled off on the letter paper of the defunct life insurance company, and to their genuine delight, two paper knives carved from the tusks taken from the sea monster's head which Lollie had discovered. Adorned with the emblematic figures of the Thunderbird and the Wolf they were, in their way, works of art, and Ellen, reading the penciled greeting on the paper attached to her gift, could not keep the look of surprise from her face as

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she thanked Harlan for it. It occurred to her that this young man was continually and agreeably surprising her lately.

After the distribution of the gifts, and the old-time stories told in the candlelight, Jean, by the magic of her violin coaxed them all into singing the Yuletide songs fraught with memories of the homeland;—all that is with the exception of Kayak Bill. The old man, his high forehead shining from his recent ablutions, his bushy beard hiding his new tie, sat silent, even wistful, stroking the home-made gifts that lay upon his knees. Jean as she played, wondered what long-ago memories were misting his hazel eyes.

When the singing came to an end, little Loll, without an invitation, rose and announced:

“*Now, I’m going to speak my piece.*”

He walked to the middle of the room and made a low, circular bow. In the effort to recall that “piece” he had spoken the year previous in Sunday-school, his brow puckered and his grey eyes took on a look of intense thought. His emphasis fell in strange places:

“ ’Twas *the* night before Christmas
An’ all *through* the house
Not-ta creature . . . was . . . Was *stirring*
Not-teven a mouse . . . not-*teven* a mouse . . .
Not-teven a *mouse!*”

All efforts to remember further having proved vain, Lollie, far from being embarrassed, bowed low again with the poise of one who has recited brilliantly, and took his seat amid the applause. . . .

Harlan rose at last to say goodnight. From Loll's bunk, where she was helping the sleepy boy to bed, Ellen called after him her Christmas wishes. Jean slipped into her coat and followed the young man out to the porch.

The night had turned wondrously clear, but it did not seem cold to the two who stood silently looking out on its beauty.

"Never was there such a night for Christmas carols, Gregg," said the girl after some minutes had gone by. "Wait."

She darted into the cabin and returned almost immediately with her violin tucked beneath her coat.

"I may never have a chance like this again. . . . I'm going up as far as the Lookout with you. Come."

They climbed up through the white, star-lit silence to the top of the hill. From the height they looked down through the weird half-light reflected from the snow. The formless waters kissed the ermine-wrapped shores of the Island. The sweet, hoarse voice of the sea had in it the cadence of happy child calls. There was an effect of illimitable space, of wonderful freedom. Up from the north into the night-blue bowl of the sky mystic lights unfurled themselves in pulsing, wreathing chiffon-like streamers of changing rose and violet, green and amber, red and gold—unfurled . . . trembled . . . rippled into opal splendor, and then swiftly and softly swept across the heavens and entangled themselves in the calm, friendly stars that looked down on Kon Klayu.

Jean caught her breath.

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"The Christmas lights of God," she whispered. "I have never been so near to Him before." She lifted her violin to her shoulder and began the opening bars of *Holy Night*. Gregg's voice joined the instrument, reverent, worshipful.

As she played there beside him the girl knew that they were sharing something never to be forgotten by either—the magic of a moment of perfect accord, a moment of beauty that transcended earthly things and left them but two souls worshipping together beneath the softened glory of the Northern Lights.

CHAPTER XXVI

WINTER DAYS

IT had taken Gregg Harlan some time to realize fully that mere existence on Kon Klayu was an all-absorbing problem! but when he did so the primitiveness of it stimulated, intoxicated him, not as liquor had once done, but with a freshness that cleared his brain and sent his blood racing through his veins. Every cell in his body tingled with life. He felt this exhilaration in his swinging stride, his up-lifting chin. By Christmas he was no more tormented by a craving for liquor. On the contrary he was nauseated at the memory of his stupid, sodden days at Katleean. Alaska, the Great Country, which either makes or breaks, had challenged him to prove himself a man—and he had accepted the challenge. Kon Klayu, Island of mystery and beauty had laid its charm upon him, for despite the hardships it was a place where romance and adventure were the realities of life.

For the first time in his twenty-five years he felt the spur of responsibility. He was filled with a desire to fight, to conquer, to do something to try his new strength and to earn favor in the eyes of Jean—and Ellen. He grinned boyishly to himself, sometimes,

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when this mighty urge to noble deeds resolved itself into the accomplishing of prosaic tasks such as getting in firewood and hunting shellfish.

In the matter of clothes, Boreland and Kayak were the only ones who were in any way prepared for the cold weather. Ellen had cut up a scarlet blanket to make Harlan and Loll winter coats. Jean had fashioned for herself an attractive mackinaw from a small white blanket, and the young man was not blind to the picture she made, red-cheeked, laughing, trotting along beside him on the beach as they looked for sea food.

One windy day Kayak Bill came in from the beach without his cherished sombrero.

"The gol durned breeze snatched it offen my haid, and lit out with it for foreign parts," he drawled sadly as he smoothed down his wildly blown locks. Despite Ellen's anxious protests he went bareheaded after that, although he wound his scarf about his ears on extra cold days. His hair continued to grow unchecked also, for after watching Ellen earnestly manipulating an inverted bowl and a pair of scissors while she trimmed her protesting husband's hair, Kayak spoke with slow conviction:

"I hearn tell o' lady barbers down in the States, but I ain't no nature for 'em a-fussin' round my noggin. My kin folks drug me to the Methydist meetin' house once a-fore I stampeded from Texas, and the sarmon teched on a long-haired pugilist, Samson, what was trimmed by a lady barber by the name o' Dahlia." . . .

For some time Kayak and Boreland had been trying,

as they put it, to "taper off" on their tobacco. Harlan, when he found that the *Hoonah* was not coming, had given up smoking so that the older men might longer enjoy what tobacco was left. After days of silent, mental wrestling with his desire, he reached the stage where he had successfully downed the craving, and he watched with grim amusement, and no little sympathy, his partners' vain efforts to limit themselves to one pipe after each meal.

There finally came a day when Kayak and Shane sat at the supper table lighting their farewell pipes.

"Goo' bye, lovely Lady Nicotine!" Airily Boreland waved a hand through the smoke. "I bid thee farewell without fear and without regret! . . . As a matter of fact, Bill, I've intended to quit right along, and this makes it easy. Filthy habit, anyway, and I don't want to set a bad example for Loll."

It was from Jean that Harlan learned the details of the following dismal day. It was so stormy that the men could not go out to work. After breakfast Shane and Kayak had risen from the table and, pipes in hand, instinctively sought the tobacco-box in the corner. Their fingers met on the bare tin bottom. With blank looks they faced each other.

"Hell, Kayak, I'd forgotten!" Boreland grinned sheepishly. "Now begins the battle of Nicotine! Buck up, pard!" He forced a cheerfulness into his tones as he slapped Kayak's shoulder.

Kayak Bill looked down at the empty pipe cupped lovingly in his hand. With a sound between a grunt and a groan he put it back into his pocket and daw-

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dled dispiritedly off into the other room to his bunk behind the tarpaulin.

Shane thrust both hands deep into the pockets of his overalls and shifted his weight alternately from heel to toe. . . . Crossing over to the stove where his wife stood he bent upon her a wistful, little-lost-dog expression, so ridiculous in a man of his size that Ellen burst into laughter.

"Poor—little—thing!" she sympathized, patting his cheek. "It's lost its pacifier, it has!"

With a sickly grin Shane turned to the window and dully watched the slanting sleet blown by the gale. . . . Kayak's puffing snore came presently from the other room. Boreland wheeled about, glaring.

"By thunder! to think that old cuss can *sleep* at a time like this! . . . The man must have a heart of stone! For two cents I'd go in there and . . ."

He paced the floor, his hands fidgeting.

"Are you *sure*, El, you didn't save out a box of tobacco on us, just to give us a bit of a surprise now," he asked hopefully for the third time that morning.

In the days that followed Harlan could not make up his mind who suffered most during the "battle of Nicotine"—Shane or Kayak Bill, or Ellen. He grew to feel a bit sorry for Ellen. He found himself gradually assuming the duties neglected by the other two men during their period of misery. Boreland lost much of his good-natured cheerfulness. He was inclined to view the food situation with increased alarm. He often spoke sharply to Lollie, and sometimes to his wife. But invariably after an irritable outburst he

sought to make up to the boy with some home-made toy, or a new story of adventure. With Ellen his method of apology was different. He would put his arm across her shoulders and look down at her whimsically.

"I swan to goodness, little fellow, if I wasn't an angel I couldn't live with you at all, at all, you're that peevish since I've stopped smoking." Then with his most wistful Irish look he would add, "Be patient with me El. I'm having a hell of a time."

As Harlan watched the struggles of his partners he grew to have a better opinion of his own power of self-control. Jean was responsible for this in a way. Sometimes on stormy days when it was impossible to go outside, the patience of the whole family would be sorely tried by the actions of the older men. They would research every nook and corner of the cabin, go into the pockets of every garment and even rip linings in their efforts to find some over-looked bit of tobacco. After just so much of this, Jean would turn on them scornfully and compare their childish actions with those of Harlan when he was undergoing the same deprivation. Undoubtedly this holding him up as a good example had the opposite effect to that hoped for by Jean, but it nevertheless caused a warm glow to encircle his heart.

One day Boreland made a great discovery: By pulverizing the old nicotine-laden pipes, of which there were over half a dozen, he found that the resultant mixture could be smoked. He and his partner in disgrace did no work that day. In disgust Ellen banished them to the woodshed to do their smoking. From this

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place of refuge Kayak Bill's drawling tones of immense satisfaction floated out at intervals:

"Honest to grandma, Shane, I'm a-feelin' like a new man."

By the time the corncobs had all been pulverized and consumed, and but one cannabalistic pipe, itself pared down until it held but a thimbleful, was left between them, all the other members of the party had arrayed themselves against the sufferers. By persisting even though sickness was often the penalty for smoking an extra strong pulverized pipe, they had forfeited the sympathy of all hands. Matters came to a crisis one afternoon, when Boreland, taking a candle, crawled up into the loft to make one more search among the provisions.

Suddenly there was heard a great commotion overhead—a beating and a floundering about.

"Hey! Get some water up here—quick!" came Shane's alarmed shout. "I've set the bloody place afire!"

Half an hour later the fire was out, thanks to the efforts of the bucket brigade which rushed water from the spring, but in the roof was a gapping hole, and much of the outfit stowed away in the loft was wet again.

Boreland came slowly down from above. He was besmudged, apologetic and sheepish. Ellen was waiting for him. She looked him over from head to foot, her blue eyes snapping, scorn and supreme disgust radiating from her. Next she turned to Kayak Bill and took him in with the same look.

"Now, men, listen to me," she said sternly, as they both started to slip toward the door. "I've reached the limit of my endurance." She emphasized her next remarks with a decisive finger. "The *very next one* of you who mentions tobacco inside this cabin will be banished to the smoke-house to live by himself. I mean every word I say!" With hang-dog looks the culprits turned away and disappeared through the door. Ellen, with business-like brevity, climbed up into the loft to investigate. Harlan followed.

He found a roll of tar paper with which to mend the hole in the roof and helped Ellen shift the dunnage bags which had been wetted by the water. They worked in silence for some time.

Suddenly Ellen stopped in her operations. She rested her palms on the floor and looked up at Harlan. In the candle-lit gloom of the loft he could see that her eyes were twinkling. A new friendliness was in the ingenuous smile she gave him.

"Gregg," she said in a tone that finally admitted him to her friendship, "remember—there isn't a man living who cannot be benefited by having a good, sound scolding once in a while." . . .

And so the days passed until the end of January. They were stormy ones for the most part, yet no ruby sand showed on the beach of Kon Klayu. One clear, cold morning Harlan and Jean were gathering shellfish among the boulders on Sunset Point. The air was strangely still and under the pale sunshine the sapphire waters were tinged with rose and lavender. They had long been accustomed to those tricks played with

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sea and clouds by the magician Mirage, and today the crest of each billow was magnified until, on the horizon the points seemed to leap up into the sky. Above a lucid space in the southwest a mass of silver and amethyst tinted clouds moved slowly and spread out like a platform. They sat on a flat boulder to watch the changing beauty of the colors. Their daily forays for shellfish had deepened their love of the sea—its ways of mystery that were ever bringing to their attention some new loveliness of form and tint. Now, before their incredulous eyes there appeared rising from the cloud bank the illusion of graciously rounded domes, spires, minarets, and the next instant they were gazing on a city of enchantment softly reflected in a pearly sea—a silvery city of fantasy like an exquisite shadowy drawing of some foreign land. . . . They sat silent, entranced. How long the vision lingered neither of them knew. . . . Then a breeze fanned their faces and in a twinkling the city of dreams vanished.

They raced back to the cabin with their news but found the others on the porch. They too had witnessed the phenomenon. Kayak Bill alone showed no surprise.

“That’s what sourdoughs up here calls ‘The Silent City,’ ” he drawled. “Alasky folks have been seein’ it for yars. One time I saw it above Muir glacier, and one time when I was a-crusin’ in the Bering Sea. Sailors calls it a mirrage. If I don’t miss my guess, there’ll be hell a-poppin’ in the way of a storm purty soon.”

Kayak was right. Within twenty-four hours the worst southwest gale experienced racked the Island. The strange reverberating roll from the south Cliffs beat with weird insistence on their ears for three long days and nights. When the weather cleared the immediate need for shellfish sent Jean and Harlan out among the rocks again.

They were coming home from Skeleton Rib with their pails full of "gumboots," making a desultory search for pay-sand, which no one had seen for weeks. They left the beach and turned toward the little lake visible from the cabin porch. The storm had shifted the cannon-ball shaped boulders which characterized that part of the shore, stripped the tundra of every sign of vegetation, and exposed the brown turf beneath. Gregg in restoring his knife to his pocket, dropped it. As he stooped to pick it up a look of astonishment crossed his face. He sank on his knees and eagerly scanned the brown surface beneath.

"Jean!" There was excitement in his voice as he beckoned her. "Look!"

The girl rushed to his side. She bent to look and caught her breath.

The dark surface of the turf was flecked with glittering colors of gold.

CHAPTER XXVII

SPRING

ONCE again gold cast its magic spell over the Island of Kon Klayu. The daily food hunting was alternated with preparations for mining the gold-bearing turf—the top of which had caught, like the nap of a blanket, the flakes of yellow metal washed up by the storms of years. Though the men knew they had not yet found the source of the Island gold, they were confident there was a small fortune in sight.

In his enthusiasm Boreland put behind him for a time the growing hatred for the White Chief of Katleean that was slowly eating into his heart, and with Kayak Bill and Harlan went about the “dead work” that preceded the actual mining. There were puddling-boxes and sluices to be built at the edge of the little lake off Skeleton Rib, and the top of the gold-carrying turf was to be cut up into squares and piled like cordwood until they were ready to shred it and run it through the sluices.

While the work went on everyone kept a sharp lookout for cannery ships going west, for along the Alaskan coast the first sign of spring is the coming of the fishing fleet from the States.

"Of course February is a month too early," said Harlan one evening as they sat about the supper table discussing the possibilities of rescue, "but we ought to have some way of attracting attention. We might put up a flag-pole on the Lookout, but—" he shrugged his shoulders, "we have no flag."

"If you men get the pole up, I'll see that you have a flag," Ellen promised.

No one had been well supplied with clothes in the beginning of the Island adventure, and gradually Ellen had used every available piece of cloth to eke out the worn and patched garments, which despite all her efforts, turned her family into tatterdemalions. But she took what was left to put together her flag: some flour sacks, an old blue shirt of Shane's and a red blanket that could hardly be spared. The men hunted for days among the drift of the beach before finding a log the proper length and shape for their purpose, but at the end of a week the pole was in place.

The hoisting of the flag for the first time was made an event which demanded the presence of every member of the party on the Lookout. Sudden, poignant emotion stirred the six tattered figures that stood about the pole as the crude banner unfurled its stars and stripes to the strong breeze. Home-made and heavy it was, but it fluttered above them, the emblem that has ever stood for hope, for freedom, for justice, and there was that in the sight of the flag which caused the men to stand with bared heads, while Ellen and Jean viewed it through a mist of tears.

"Oh, surely, *surely* now, some ship will sight it and

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come in!" proclaimed Jean, as she turned to scan the sea, her face alight with the faith inspired by the faded colors.

It was the latter part of March before the smoke of the first cannery boat was seen moving slowly to the westward. Though the vessel was so far away the watchers knew their low Island could hardly be seen from its deck, the mere fact that ships were beginning to navigate the northern sea promised well, and the flag was kept flying from the Lookout day and night, its stars turned down as a sign of distress.

It was decided that Jean and Harlan should attend to the evening signal fires. There was little darkness in the nights, for already the long Alaska daylight had set in, but by placing half-dry seaweed on the driftwood flame a great smoke resulted that, it was hoped, might be seen by passing vessels.

It was good to sit about the fire looking down on the sea while the dusk crept in, and now that Ellen had, to some extent, modified her opinions regarding Harlan, there was nothing to hinder the growing of a delightful, outdoor companionship that made the hours pass with miraculous rapidity for the two young fire tenders. Past hardships and hunger were forgotten up there on the Lookout. The evenings became hours of confidences when they discussed their plans, their dreams, their budding philosophies of life. They came to know each other's moods and each other's thoughts and that magic of shared adventures which can be more binding than love.

One night Gregg told her of his early ambition to

be a mining engineer, his year at a mid-western school of mines, where his studies were terminated, he admitted with entire frankness, by a request to leave. He told her also of his return home to San Francisco, and the subsequent years of aimless drifting which ended in the final break with his father.

"I can see now," he concluded, "that poor old dad had good reason for disappointment. As a last resort he sent me to Katleean hoping that I'd get some sense jolted into me—but—well, I didn't, Jean, until . . . until the *Hoonah* put into the bay. I've been wondering what he is thinking now. . . . He hasn't had a word from me since August, although, of course, he hears from Katleean—" He checked himself, pausing a moment as if he were on the point of telling her something else. Then: "Dad is—he's interested in the Alaska Fur Trading Company, you know."

But Jean's mind was already intent on the young man's future.

"Now you *are* going to wake up and do something, though," she declared with a decisive movement of her little head. "I don't care much for what you've told me of your past, Gregg," she admitted frankly, "but—" she waved her hand with a gesture of dismissal— "up here it isn't yesterday that counts, it's today and tomorrow. This is a wonderful new land to begin in——"

"And you just watch me do it, Jean!" he interrupted her enthusiastically. As if he already felt the need of action he rose from the ground and thrusting his hands in his pockets, began walking up and down before her.

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"I've done a lot of thinking over there in my little Hut—a *lot* of it, and I know this country has gotten a hold on me, some way. It's mine from now on. There's something about it that makes me feel alive. I want to get out and hustle like the dev—dickens. Honestly, if it wasn't for you and Ellen and Loll, I could be glad we have been put up against it here on Kon Klayu! I've actually enjoyed the fighting for food and warmth and shelter! . . . We'll all have a good stake when we leave here, Jean, but already I'm planning to come back. I have a few ideas about mining that I'd like to try out."

The girl looked up at him, her eyes glowing with interest. Encouraged, he took his place once more by the signal fire and began in detail his plans for the further prospecting and development of the Island.

But not all their hours on the Lookout were spent in the discussion of mining. They seemed to have the whole world to themselves up there—an enchanted world, cool, redolent of hidden sprouting green things and the smell of driftwood smoke; a world tinctured with a sheer beauty that neither of them had ever known before. They had reached the stage in their companionship where sometimes they sat silent for long minutes, only occasionally looking across the fire at each other with the smile of understanding that is often better than speech. Sometimes they laughed together as only youth can laugh, over inconsequential things, and sometimes he sang to her—songs of the sea, men's songs at first, but these gave place later to the songs of sentiment that may, when the

singer choose, be made more intimate, more tenderly personal than the most personal spoken word.

Jean, after she had gone down to her little bunk at night, often lay there wondering how, under the circumstances, she could be so happy, especially since the food situation was becoming more desperate each day. But, with the exception of occasional lapses into acute anxiety, she was strangely content and confident for the future.

One morning she was awakened by Loll's excited whisper.

"Jean! Oh J-e-a-n! Do you hear anything?" The youngster was standing beside her bunk, the early light falling on his red head, his ear raised alertly after the manner of the little dog in a famous phonograph advertisement. She roused herself drowsily and sat up to listen. Above the sound of the surf on the beach came the faint wild call of gulls.

"Oh, Loll, winter's gone!" she exclaimed just above a whisper. "The birds have come back to nest!"

She bounded out of bed and a moment later the two slipped quietly out to the porch. The light fall of snow had already been gone for weeks. It was a glorious morning of sunshine and sparkling sea. Looking up she saw against the cobalt sky the white wings of sea-gulls—the harbingers of spring.

Her happiness in the sight was somewhat lessened as the sound of coughing came from inside the cabin. Everyone but Ellen appeared to be standing well the enforced diet of bread and shellfish upon which they were now living. Sometimes Jean was worried over

her sister's condition. She suspected that never from the first had Ellen eaten her full share of the food, even when they had had beans and rice and oatmeal. Her sister could not eat the tough "gumboots" and her only nourishment was obtained from bread and black coffee. Ellen still went about her household tasks, but it took her longer to do them now and it was evident to Jean's critical eye that her strength was waning. Meat—meat was what she needed, the girl thought. The pigeon—once she suggested to Ellen that it might be killed, but her sister opposed the idea so violently that Jean never mentioned it again.

One day Harlan brought down a sea-gull with a stone. Jean hopefully cooked it, but the flesh was so tainted with fish that no one could eat it. The sea-parrots had returned to the Island but these wary little birds kept far out over the water.

There came a morning when Ellen did not get up for breakfast. The men left early for the lake. They were devoting all their time to their mining, and secure in the thought that they had struck something rich, they were eager for the clean-up; but to Jean, stepping quietly about her household tasks, gold did not seem valuable now. It made no difference how much they found—it would not buy them one ounce of nourishing food—and nourishing food was what Ellen must have, and soon.

The girl tip-toed to the bed and looked down at her sister's face, white and thin against the tumbled mass of golden-brown hair. There was something small and very girlish-looking about Ellen as she lay there—

and something suggestive of a great weariness. Jean felt a sudden tenderness for her—a desire to clasp her sister in her strong young arms and shield her, from what she could not tell. She stooped and softly kissed the small, work-stained hand that lay outside the blanket.

As she continued her work, the plan which had often before suggested itself to her, now returned. Ellen's peculiar conduct in regard to the pigeon precluded her mentioning it to her sister. She took a sheet of thin paper and in painstaking, minute characters wrote a message. She would attach it to the pigeon and turn the bird loose. Perhaps it might fly back to Katleean, and then, surely, if the White Chief found her message he would make an effort to come at once.

Half an hour later she had the pigeon on the beach below the cabin. She was urging it to fly, but the bird merely spread its wings and fluttered about. Fearing that the long confinement had deprived it of the power of flight, Jean was redoubling her efforts, when Loll came running along the sand.

"Gee Whiz, Jean!" he yelled, "What-cha doing with my pigeon? Can't you see he can't fly good yet? Dad clipped his wings that time one of them got caught in the hinge of his cage." And Lollie, with coaxing noises and terms of endearment proceeded to gather his pet into his arms.

Obliged by Ellen's illness to assume the responsibilities of the larder Jean was surprised and dismayed at the small amount of food that was left them. She tried to banish the fears that this knowledge brought

her by talking cheerfully of the certainty of procuring seabird eggs.

Spring had the effect of coming suddenly. The yellow grass and bare branches which had greeted them for so many months changed seemingly overnight. The adventurers awakened one morning to find that the alders had burst into pungent, sticky little green leaves and the tundra had taken on a tinge of emerald. When the Indian celery had grown a foot in height Jean and Loll brought an arm-load to the cabin. The girl remembered that Senott at Katleean had told her "him plenty good eatin' when salmon run." Everyone craved something green and though the celery was hollow-stalked, very watery and of a strong musky taste and odor, they ate it, because, as Loll put it, it *felt* like green stuff going down, anyway.

Ducks and geese flew over the Island so low that the sibilant sound of their wings could be heard from the porch. Shane often tried to kill one with a stone, but without success. He and Kayak Bill had long ago used all the ammunition for their revolvers endeavoring to shoot hair-seals off the south end. Shane's revolver finally disappeared entirely. One day, however, after he had stood long by Ellen's bed, he went out to the shed. Jean coming upon him there had found him thoughtfully twirling the weapon on his finger—his trigger finger as he had often called it. Although he announced that there were no more cartridges for it the girl later came upon five wrapped in a bandana handkerchief.

When at last the flowers began to bud, Jean and her

nephew climbed the gulch trail to the top of the Island where Kobuk lay under the tundra on the crest of the hill. The lone tree, so like a woman with wind-blown hair, had lost one of its branches during the winter gales, but it still stood, as if looking out across Kobuk's grave to the far-away, illimitable skyline; ever looking, Jean thought, as she was, for a ship that never came.

She and Lollie made Kobuk's resting place a bed of transplanted violets and iris and dog-tooth lilies. When the work was finished, Lollie stood leaning on the club he had begun to carry, as his one desire in life at this period was to emulate Robinson Crusoe. He looked thoughtfully down at the grave for some time.

"Perhaps, after all, Jean, it's better that Kobuk died," he said at last. "We'd have nothing to feed him now, poor old Kobuk, and he'd be hungry, like us." He raised his thin little face to watch a sea-parrot flying overhead with a fish in its bill.

Jean leaned against the tree, one of her recurrent floods of hopelessness sweeping her. Far down the tundra toward the north she could see the flag-pole on the Lookout. The tattered home-made flag hung dispiritedly in the still sunny air, and the smoke of the signal fire was a mere straight-rising wisp. The calls of happy mating gulls came to mock her—gulls replete with the bountiful food of the sea. Today she was hungry, so hungry that every atom of her body cried for food, hot, nourishing food which she had not known for months. And Ellen, back there at the cabin, was growing weaker and weaker each day.

The girl's eyes dully followed the low-flying sea-

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parrots. In a half conscious way she noticed that many of them came toward the crest of the hill and disappeared. Sea-parrots were not as fishy tasting as gulls, as she had heard Kayak Bill say. If only they had some way of killing these birds perhaps the broth and the flesh might bring back Ellen's strength.

"Jean, isn't that the place the old bear came up the hill?" Lollie's voice broke in on her thoughts. He was pointing to the scrubby growth on the brow of the hill where she had first seen the bear of Kon Klayu. "Let's go over and see."

As they walked toward the ridge their feet made no sound on the soft tundra. They peered down hill into the shady recesses under the stunted alder and salmon-berry bushes. Jean's nostrils twitched as there was wafted up to her the strong, acrid odor which lingers about the places of nesting birds. As her eyes became accustomed to the dimness, she ventured a remark which died abruptly as she caught her breath. Beneath the low canopy of branches the ground was bare of vegetation, and on the cool brown earth, packed hard by the patter of webbed feet, a dozen or more sea-parrots were sitting not fifteen slanting feet below!

At the sight of them Loll dropped to his hands and knees and, club in hand, crept cautiously down under the low-growing bushes. Inch by inch he drew nearer to the birds. . . . Then, with a swift movement he was in the midst of wildly flapping wings, clubbing fiercely at crimson-beaked heads.

Jean, fearing that he was in danger, threw herself on the ground and tried to wriggle forward to him,

but the low growth made the passage of her larger body impossible. She drew herself back and called frantically to the boy. She could hear the commotion and see the parrots one by one flying clumsily out as they escaped from the spot where he fought. With a shout of encouragement to him she made another attempt to crawl under the brush. At that moment Loll's freckled face was thrust through the undergrowth. He turned to tug at something, grunting and straining as if trying to free it from the tangle.

"Jean! I've got 'em! I've got 'em!" he yelled.

A second later he was standing before her, breathless, his blouse torn from his shoulders, his face scratched. In his bleeding little hands he held five dead sea-parrots. "Killed 'em with my club, Jean, just like Robinson Crusoe, 'cause they can't fly away quick under there!" he explained. "They've all got little tunnels under there, too—nests I think they are, but I couldn't reach the end of 'em when I put in my arm!"

An hour later Jean was attending to the cooking of the birds. When skinned, only the breast was found to be edible. The meat when cooked was coarse and dark red, but it was a palatable sea-parrot and dumpling mulligan that the girl evolved.

When the men returned from Skeleton Rib that night there was more rejoicing over the food than there was over the fact that at last everything was in readiness at the lake for the first clean-up. Three pudding-boxes stood full of the soft brown muck that had once been turf. The sluices were in place ready for the water that would be turned into them the fol-

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lowing day, and the tools, wheelbarrow and the cart had been drawn aside, clearing the space for action.

"Tomorrow, boys, we'll be bringing home *hi-yu* gold!" Shane asserted confidently at supper. "And before the end of the week we'll all have enough to go anywhere we wish. Now that we are certain of plenty of birds sure our hearts should be light as feathers—for a boat will surely be along soon!"

On the Lookout that night Jean said good-night early to Harlan. As she came down the hill to the cabin she stopped to look at the wide-spreading ocean. The sun had gone down in a strange sea mist and below her the waters heaved dim and vast and ghost-like in the twilight. There was a hushed feeling in the air. It may have been that she was more tired than usual, for when she slipped into her little bunk she fell into a heavy sleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

It was Shane's incredulous shout that awakened her.

"Kayak! Come here!"

She could hear Kayak Bill moving quickly toward the door in the living-room.

"Ellen, you come out, too!" It was evident that Shane was laboring under an intense astonishment.

The girl clambered out of her bunk and flinging on a kimono, started for the porch. Before she reached the door Kayak Bill's unbelieving exclamation sounded:

"By—hell! The lake—" he paused in sheer leaden amazement. "The lake is *gone!*"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CLEFT

ON the porch all eyes were turned toward the south where the silver of the little lake off Skeleton Rib had always glimmered through its screen of alders. There was no friendly sparkle of water this morning, and gone were the trees that bordered the shore nearest the beach. Instead, a strange desolation, more noticeable because of the brilliant sunshine, hung over the spot, which now showed a vague-reddish brown in the distance. It had the sickening effect of an empty socket from which the eye has been torn.

The bewildered look on Kayak's face was slowly changing to one of enlightenment.

"Folks," he said quietly. "We're lucky to be alive this morning. There's been a tidal wave!"

His eye was taking in the length of the beach that lay between the cabin and the lake. There was a weird look of alteration about it, as if a giant hand had tampered with it during the night. Piles of drift-logs were stacked up far inland, and the vegetation on the banks above the beach was flattened and in many instances wept completely away. Close at hand—not twenty

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feet from the cabin—lay windrows of seaweed, left there by the spent wash of the great wave. Death, swift, sweeping, terrible, had been diverted only by the high bank that stood below the cabin.

It seemed incredible, monstrous, that they all should have slept peacefully while the mass of water was rolling in on them from the deep. Kayak Bill, who had once seen a tidal wave on Bering Sea, pictured it advancing in the grey unnatural night from the far reaches of the ocean, growing larger and larger as it neared the shallows off Kon Klayu, and then, tossing its dancing crest to the sky in gigantic abandon, curling down from aloft in green-white, crushing splendor and flinging itself far over the beachline in its endeavor to encompass them all.

Without waiting for breakfast the men went down to the spot where the little lake had been. Nothing but a dark ooze remained. Every block of gold-carrying turf, every puddling-box, sluice and tool had been carried out to sea. The work of weeks had come to naught. Their last hope of gold was gone.

During the gloomy fortnight that followed it was the food supply, however, and not the calamity of the tidal wave that was subject of the most discussion. With the exception of flour there was little left of the outfit that had been landed on Kon Klayu, and to the consternation and chagrin of the men, they discovered that Loll was the only one who could slip up on the sea-parrots and kill them with a club. Shane and Harlan and even Kayak Bill tried it repeatedly with no success. They were unable to creep down under the

low-growing brush in a manner stealthy enough to reach the birds. Even Loll found it impossible to approach them in the open, and they grew more wary day by day. Six people depended on the child for nourishing food, and Lollie, after that first wild morning when he had discovered his ability to kill the birds, found his tender heart revolting against his bloody task.

Ellen, slowly recovering her strength now that sea-parrot broth had been added to the daily fare, had become painfully intuitive in the matter of all those phases of the situation which Shane and the others clumsily tried to keep from her. Though apparently asleep, she knew the instant that Shane crept from his bed in the very early mornings before the sun had dried the dew on the tundra. She could hear him tip-toe into Lollie's bunk and with forced lightness call softly:

"Come, Loll, son. Hop up now. We must be after the birds this fine morning!"

"Oh, dad! I don't want to kill any more—I can't do it, dad! . . . Let this morning go by . . . please!" . .

"Whist, lad! Your mother'll hear you. Come along now, son, we'll talk it over on the outside."

"Oh, please, *please* . . ."

Quickly Ellen would put her fingers over her ears that she might not hear the beseeching little-boy voice, but she knew the moment Shane lifted the reluctant child from his warm bunk, and she knew, too, that Shane's heart must be aching with the pity of it, as was her own.

One morning, thinking they had gone, she raised her

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head to note the hour. There was the sound of a quick step on the porch outside.

"Oh, dad!" came Lollie's pleading tones, and Ellen knew just how his grey eyes, big now in his small thin face, were raised to his father's, "dad, if you could see them down there under the leaves, strutting so cute-like and innocent in front of their little tunnel nests getting ready for their babies!" Then with passionate intensity: "Today . . . couldn't you just let me off for to-day, dad?" Inspired, perhaps, by some shade of feeling in Shane's eyes he went on with hurried, promising emphasis: "An' *tomorrow*, maybe tomorrow, dad, I'll feel like getting lots of 'em! Honest, maybe I will!"

Ellen, with a moan of mental anguish, buried her face in her pillow and covered her ears to shut out the rest. That her boy, friend and lover of all wild things, was obliged, against his will, to slaughter birds in order that they might live seemed more than she could bear.

And as if to add to the hopelessness of the situation, daily now steamers and sailing vessels passed far out on the North Pacific, but none swerved in its course. There was nothing to hinder the *Hoonah's* coming—nothing but the word of the White Chief of Katleean. Ellen chafed inwardly as the long, light days and nights dragged by. Help must come soon, and for some time she had been counting the hours until the pigeon's wing-feathers should grow out again. As soon as the bird could fly she was going to take it to the Lookout and speed it on its way with her message of capitulation to Paul Kilbuck.

The long sunny days of May passed, turning Kon Klayu into a garden of wild flowers. It was violet time with great bunches of purple blossoms nodding against the hillsides. Above the beachline rice-grass waved luxuriantly. Indian celery thrust its graceful, creamy parasols above beach forget-me-nots, strawberry blooms, black lilies, blue geraniums and thick carpets of delicate wee flowers that have no names. The green of the tundra on top of the Island was splashed with yellow buttercups and pink and lavender daisies, and on every little brown pool and lake floated golden lilies. The warm salt wind from the sea stirred the fragrance of it all—the flowers, the moist tundra, the sun-warmed sand into a perfume that is the breath of Alaska; a clean, invigorating perfume that once known can never be forgotten. It is charged with that indefinable charm, that hint of promise, which is so much a part of the great North country.

To Jean and Gregg, racing along the beaches on their various hunts for food, it brought a joy of spring that, when they were in the open, made them forget completely the growing seriousness of their situation. Nearly every day now the air was softly, embracingly warm, and owing to the scarcity of garments, no one was wearing more than was necessary. The men had long been going barefooted, and Jean, as soon as the weather and the nature of her work permitted it, put her only remaining pair of worn shoes in the loft against the day when she should leave Kon Klayu. She, too, went barefooted for the most part, delighting in the feel of the cool sand against her feet, but she

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carried with her the hair-seal moccasins given her by Add-'em-up Sam's widow at Katleean. These she put on to walk over stones or along the tundra.

As the sea-parrots were daily growing more wary, and Lollie had now to exercise the greatest caution to get near enough to club them, the need of eggs became imperative. One day Jean and Harlan were racing along the beach headed for the south cliffs to make their accustomed search. A rope coiled about the young man's waist held to him a bucket which dangled and bobbed as he ran. The afternoon was sunny and a fresh sea wind lifted the hair on their bare heads. The surf ringed the grey sands at their feet with long foaming lines.

"It's so beautiful, so beautiful, this land and sea, Gregg, that I feel today must bring us some good luck!" Jean, out of sheer exuberance, was skimming along ahead, her arms outspread, her chin high, as she dipped and leaped in imitation of Senott's sea-gull dance which she had seen at the Potlatch.

"Wait a minute, wild girl!" called Harlan, endeavoring to accomplish the feat of rolling up a trouser leg as he hobbled. "Come back here!" His voice took on an exaggerated tone of threat. "Don't you realize that a squaw's place is three steps to the rear!"

In answer to his shout she turned, and laughingly waited for him. He advanced, suddenly assuming the slouching, shoulder-swinging gait of the "bad man," his brows drawn and fierce, his chin thrust out.

"Don't cross muh, woman!" he hissed, melodramatically. "I tell yuh, I'm rough, an' I'm tough, an' I'm

from Katleean! Muh bite is poi-sson, an' muh s-s-s-ting is d-e-a-t-h! To the rear, I say!"

Quick as a flash the girl bent, and catching up a long streamer of damp kelp tossed it about his neck, retaining her hold on it as she ran ahead.

"Speak not to me of the rear, Man!" she intoned boastfully. "*I am Xun, the Unfettered! Xun, the Woman-of-the-North-Wind! Men move not in the North except by my will. My breath in their lungs brings oblivion. My voice in their ears—and the trail—is—empty! Come!*"

Laughing derisively at his pawing efforts to dislodge the clammy kelp, she drew him along until the streamer broke. Then still talking their happy nonsense, they trotted side by side toward the cliffs.

Half a mile farther on Jean sat down on a spherical boulder and donned her moccasins. Afterward they turned in from the beach, crossed a flat sweep of tundra and ascended the hill to the top of the Island. As they walked toward the edge of the cliffs the shrill chorus of thousands of sea-birds grew louder.

"O-o-o-o!" there was a little bell-like shiver in the girl's voice. "There's no sound in all the world so wild, so suggestive of the mystery of the untamed, as the calling of nesting gulls, Gregg!" They stood on the promontory with the winged things dipping and swirling all about them. Jean continued slowly, as if trying to put into words some illusive feeling. "Sometimes—it frightens me—I don't know why—and at the same time, it fills me with such a sense of freedom and lightness that often, just for a little moment, I almost be-

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lieve I too might rise into the air and balance myself against the breeze with them!"

Harlan had never seen the nesting grounds of gulls in season, but Jean, before coming to Kon Klayu, had once gone ashore on a gull island during laying time.

"For weeks afterward," she told him, every night when I closed my eyes I could see the green waving grass and grey sand dotted with hundreds and hundreds of crude nests. Each nest contained from one to three eggs, larger than duck eggs, and of a Nile-green color closely speckled with brown, yellow and lavender. Why, they were so near together, Gregg, that it was difficult to step without crushing the eggs!"

With the memory of the gull island in her mind, she started with Harlan to traverse the stretch of green back of the promontory.

Back and forth for a square mile they went, searching the flat above the cliffs. Gulls, flying above, eyed them curiously, making strange human sounds. Occasionally one alighted on the ground. As often as this happened they raced hopefully to the spot but found nothing but grass blades bending from the wind.

"It's no use, Jean," Harlan decided, after two hours' vain effort. "It's too early for them to lay. Let's go back to the edge of the cliffs. The shags lay earlier, I believe, only their nests are so blamed hard to get at down there."

Jean was not enthusiastic about shag nests.

"They fill me with melancholy—those long-necked, black creatures, Gregg," she said uneasily. "Lollie and I call them witch-birds. I remember last fall we used

to sit on the porch steps in the afterglow, watching them—strings of dusky, witch-birds, speeding silent and low over the darkening water to the cliffs. But, if you wish," she added, "we'll go and see."

They headed for the windy heights overlooking the ocean, where nodding tundra grass fringed the space beyond. Harlan took her hand as they crept close to the edge. They peered down through the cloud of wild fowl that swarmed in uncounted thousands before their eyes. Three hundred feet below, deliberate blue rollers, with spray-laced tops swept in and broke against the rocks, the impact sending whitened water high into the air. The face of the cliff was plastered with sea-birds: murrens, gulls, sea-parrots and cormorants. Harlan threw a stone down and the air became black with them, leaving the numbers in the rocks apparently the same. Sea-parrots flew in from the water and disappeared under the overhanging sod at the top. Mingled with the breath of the ocean was the wild, unforgettable odor that clings to the places where sea-birds roost.

Suddenly Harlan spoke. "There *are* shags eggs down there, Jean, but the cliff right here is too steep for us to get them. I couldn't even let you down over the edge on the rope. But I'll tie one end to you and we'll go along here until we find a place from which I can descend, perhaps."

They drew back from their perilous position, and after making fast the rope about Jean's waist, proceeded, stopping at intervals to lie flat and look down over the rim of space.

They were feeling their way along the highest part of the Island, when suddenly at their feet the tundra opened in a deep cleft not over five feet wide. It began six yards or more back from the edge and led down between crumbling, rocky walls at a fearful incline, to a ledge thirty feet below.

Jean drew back with a cry at the sense of peril that came over her, but Harlan looked eagerly down.

"By Jove, there are a *lot* of eggs on that ledge," he announced enthusiastically, "and we can get them!" He hesitated a moment, considering. His eyes sought hers. "You're not strong enough to lower me down to the ledge, Jean, but—would—would you be frightened if I should let you down to them?"

For one awful moment the sea and sky and birds swirled together as the girl stood, steeped in fear. Then the raucous cries of the gulls penetrated her consciousness like shrieking voices calling: "Coward! Quitter!"

Harlan was saying convincingly: "I wouldn't let you fall, Jean. My arms are strong as a blacksmith's—" he flexed the muscles beneath his thin shirt—"and see, there's a depression here at the head of the chasm. I can stand in it and brace myself!"

Ten minutes later Jean, with her heart beating fearfully, stood facing Harlan, as she prepared to back down the steep rocky slide.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SECRET OF THE CLIFFS

AS she felt herself going down step by step, Jean kept her eyes resolutely shut. She steadied herself with outstretched arms and hands just touching each wall of the cleft. The rope tightened about her, as inch by inch Gregg let it out from above. Gradually as all went well, curiosity overcame her fear and she opened her eyes. At that instant there came a whirr and a flapping of wings that set her heart thumping again, and out from the overhanging tundra on top of the cliff an astonished sea-parrot flew, so close that the tip of his wing stung her cheek. She could hear other birds below and about her beating their wings and hurling themselves in alarm from their resting places. Far beneath the billows detoned against the crags. With hands and feet now she clung to the rough juttings of rock as she was being lowered. Harlan's voice, shouting encouragement, gradually became fainter. At last she felt her feet strike the flat of the ledge.

With a gasp of relief she straightened and turned to look about her. She stood high on a narrow shelf

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thrust out from the sheer-rising cliff. Before her face swarms of birds fanned the air, their wrangle and jangle sounding almost in her ears. The wind stirred the acrid smells about her. At her feet were several crude nests of sticks. They contained eggs smaller than hen's eggs and of a pale greenish color. They were the first she had seen for nine months and the sight sent a thrill through her. With a little laugh at her own enthusiasm she untied the bucket at her waist and carefully worked her way from nest to nest as she gathered them.

Jean, not being one of those who find themselves affected by heights, quickly became accustomed to her perilous shelf above the sea. After tucking a large silk handkerchief about the eggs to insure their safety, she sat down on the ledge to look about her. Every nook and cranny in the surrounding rocks was alive with birds. Close to her, long-necked shags on wide-spread wings balanced with dusky gracefulness before sailing away through the myriad screaming gulls. Dignified murrelets, their backs to the sea, sat soldier-like in the crevices like plumb-bobs from their perches. Huge-beaked sea-parrots squatted with comical solemnity or flapped quickly away toward the outer reaches of the ocean where thousands of their kind floated on the water like a black cloud. These were the love-days in bird-land—the mating time for all feathered things. Sitting there, the girl felt a sudden kindred friendliness for all these small creatures—a feeling of at-one-ness and sympathy with their little lives and nest-making ambitions.

As she became more at home on her ledge she began to look about her with a view to exploring further. She lay flat on the rock and peered down. Below her on the floor of the sea, now exposed by the falling tide, she saw dozens of the strange, perfectly round boulders that had become so familiar to all on Kon Klayu. They were of assorted sizes, and where they lay thickest there was no seaweed or kelp. . . . After some minutes she became aware that from one end of her ledge where it joined the cliff, and running parallel to it, rough, out-jutting rocks slanted downward in a crude, natural stairway, almost to the beach. With care, she told herself, after a long scrutiny, she might make the descent. The rope about her she knew could not reach to the bottom of the cliff. She would untie it and trust entirely to her clinging hands and prehensile moccasined feet. She stood up, suddenly confident of her own powers in this element. Cupping her hands about her mouth she shouted to Harlan informing him of her intention. Evidently he did not hear her, or else she could not hear his answer. After waiting a few minutes she untied the rope from about her and cautiously began the descent.

Very slowly and carefully she lowered herself, her feet and hands clinging tenaciously. The keen salt wind ballooned her ragged skirts about her. Occasionally when her foot slipped and showers of loosened particles rolled down startling birds from their perches in screaming clouds, she could feel the blood pounding in her temples in momentary fright. At first she marveled at her own daring—then she reveled in it.

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As she descended she began to experience that thrill which comes to those who tread where no other human foot has trodden, who look on scenes no other human eye has visioned. She felt sure she was the first to visit this part of Kon Klayu, for the steep cliffs at the south were inaccessible both from the east and from the west side of the Island, even at the lowest tide. And in all the tales of Kon Klayu she had heard, no one had ever mentioned the chasm down which she had come to the ledge. In this section of tidal waves and occasional heavy earthquakes it was possible that the cleft had opened up recently.

At last she felt her feet on the beach below. She straightened and turned to face the ocean. The waters were sewn with jagged rocks and long-running reefs. Sleek-haired seals bobbed up to look humanly at her. A thin, high-rising jet of water afar out bespoke the presence of a whale. Back of her loomed the precipitous wall of the cliff. She gasped at her own daring as her eye followed the rough stairway down which she had descended. A moment she wondered, with dismay, if she could possibly climb back again; a moment she pictured her plight should she be caught here when the tide came in and covered the narrow beach; then her attention was drawn by that which lay farther along. She ran forward, wending her way in and out between the giant balls of stone that lay about her.

At the base of the precipice just ahead of her, and level with the sea floor, she saw a huge opening. As she approached, it widened, grew higher, until she

round herself peering into the yawning mouth of a sea cavern fifty feet wide and half that in height. Like monster peas in a giant's open mouth lay the spherical boulders on the bottom of the cave.

She was frightened, yet fascinated by her discovery. She hesitated a moment then advanced slowly into the cool dampness of the place. As far ahead as her eye could pierce the dimness, the balls of stone lay catching the light on their rounded surfaces. The walls closed in about her, as she walked. Water dripped on her. Her feet splashed through puddles in the uneven, hard bottom, but here there was no trace of the seaweed that draped the rocks in all other parts of the Island.

The sound of breakers booming against the reefs came to her in the cavern with a strange reverberating effect. The underground way ran on apparently with an upward slant as far as she could see. She longed for a light so that she might explore further. . . . After some minutes advance into the deepening gloom, a feeling of timidity began to assail her. She paused leaning against a lobsided boulder. The absence of life, the stillness, the Stygian darkness ahead seemed suddenly ominous. She turned and saw the mouth of the cavern far back of her. Like an oblong frame it enclosed a small bright picture of beach and sunlit sea. Undoubtedly, she thought, when the tide was full, the ocean rushed in along the floor of the cave. Perhaps, when it was stormy, it rolled the giant balls of stone backward and forward.

Once more she glanced toward the unknown inner

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recesses of the cavern; then, with a little shiver, began making her way back toward the light again.

Her foot went down with a quick splash into a water-filled depression, and in shaking the drops from her moccasin she noted that the strings were untied. She stooped to fasten them; her eyes now perfectly accustomed to the dim light, caught a dull gleam at the edge of the pool. She was conscious of a wild thumping of her heart—an eager trembling of the hand she instinctively reached forward.

"No, no! It *can't* be," she temporized aloud, as if to fortify herself against disappointment. She forced herself to finish tying her moccasin, and even looked to the security of the other one before she hesitantly reached over and put her fingers on the object that had attracted her. She held it up to the light.

"Gold! Oh, it *is* gold!" she breathed.

In her hand lay a flat piece of yellow metal, smaller than the nugget Lollie had found, but of the same character. She dropped to her knees and with unsteady eagerness searched the bottom of the shallow pool for other nuggets. Her trembling fingers encountered another one, and still another! Then her luck seemingly came to an end.

The floor of the cave was strangely worn and filled with numerous depressions into which the sand had settled. Jean finally dipped her hands into the pool again and brought up perhaps a cupful. She ran with it out to the beach and spread it out over a boulder. It was black, showing tiny garnet-like particles, and here and there the sun glinted on colors of gold!

She gathered the precious sand together again and stuffed it into the pocket of her shirt, then swiftly set off toward the spot where she could ascend the cliff.

Suddenly she remembered Gregg waiting for her at the top. She gasped, dismayed by the knowledge that she had been totally unconscious of the passage of time. Had she been gone an hour, two—or perhaps more? What was he thinking? Perhaps he had tried to descend the cleft after her and had fallen. Perhaps he was even now lying on the ledge broken—dead.

Trying to shut out these unwelcome thoughts which took away all the joy of her discovery, she hastily began her scrambling ascent of the steep incline.

She had gone only a few feet when a shout halted her. Glancing up she saw Gregg's relieved face above her.

"Thank heaven, your're safe, Jean!" he shouted, and with reckless disregard of consequences he began to slide from the ledge toward her. "I thought you'd fallen down the precipice, when I pulled on the rope and found you not there!"

He landed on the beach at her feet. The tense look on his face faded as his eyes devoured her.

"Lord, girl, what ever made you do such a thing! I rushed back toward Skeleton Rib and met Kayak Bill coming this way. He let me down to the ledge—for I couldn't get down any other way. He's up there now waiting for us. Doggone you, anyway, you little rascal!"—he laughed shakily, grasping her by the shoulders,—“you nearly scared me to death!”

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"But just see what I've found!" Jean opened her hand suddenly, and with the three nuggets lying on it raised it toward his eyes. Then without waiting for him to look at them, she thrust them into his hand and began to drag him toward the mouth of the cave.

Half an hour later two wild, troglodytic figures were giving vent to their joy by capering and dancing about the floor of the cavern.

"Jean, you've struck it rich! You've found the source of the gold of Kon Klayu!" Harlan shouted for the fifth time. "It's better than beach mining! It's better than Shane ever dreamed! I know enough to venture that this whole blessed little isle must have a base of igneous rock and the formation of this south end, especially, is impregnated with a network of gold-bearing dykes! Why, anyone could see that by the walls of this cave!" He bent, scooped up a handful of sand, and with eager, shining eyes watched while he spread it over his palm.

"Just imagine this hollow during one of our terrific sou'westers, Jean," he went on, looking about him. "The monster billows crashing into this cavern, rolling the boulders along the bottom, grinding them along this gold-bearing formation! By Jove, the action is the same as that in a stamp mill, almost! The gold is freed, becomes mixed with the sands, and sooner or later is carried out and concentrated along certain zones on the Island."

"But away goes all the mystery of our Island, too, Gregg!" Jean's voice carried a hint of regret. "That accounts for the strange, rolling sounds we used to

hear during the storms, and for the giant balls of stone, and for everything!"

They filled their pockets with samples of the sand to take home to Shane, and ascended to the ledge. From thence, with the assistance of Kayak Bill and the rope they mounted one after the other to the top of the precipice.

The old man listened to their story of the cavern in silence, though his eyes were glowing.

"By . . . hell, from what yore a-tellin' 'o me, children, you sure have struck it rich!" he drawled at the end.

Jean threw her arms impulsively about his neck and landed a kiss on his ear.

"We all have struck it rich, you old dear! We'll stake the whole little Island of Kon Klayu, and if we can ever get to the States to get an outfit, we'll come back here and work it."

Jean knew that any show of affection caused Kayak acute, wriggling embarrassment. He backed away from her now, his cheeks fiery red. To cover his momentary confusion his hazel eye impaled Harlan's ragged back, which was showing the effects of his rapid slide down the cliff.

"Young man," he declared with slow solemnity. "The bosom o' yore pants is showing considerable wear an' tear." Gregg whirled to face him, but before he could utter a word, Kayak, now master of himself once more, drawled on: "It never rains but it pours, I reckon. I plumb forgot to tell you, Gregg, that just a-fore you drug me up here this afternoon, me and

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Boreland was a-mouchin round just south of Skeleton Rib and durned if we didn't come across the old whale-boat, high and dry with celery bushes a-growin' up around her. She's stove in some, but we can fix her—and I reckon we'll be settin' sail for the mainland in a couple o' weeks!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE PIGEON'S FLIGHT

WONDERFUL as it was, the discovery of the gold took second place with the finding of the whaleboat. Gold had no more value than sand on Kon Klayu, unless the adventurers were rescued, and the whaleboat meant at least a chance of rescue, provided it could be made tight enough to float. It is true that with summer coming on there would be an abundance of eggs, sea-parrots and later on berries, for already the north end of the Island was white with strawberry blossoms—but flour and coffee were now all that remained of the supplies, and the flour was low in the barrel. Help must come before another winter set in.

Ellen, in her first joy over the discovery of the whaleboat, had joined eagerly in the plans which the three men discussed at the cabin. She saw herself freed at last from the terrible necessity of summoning Paul Kilbuck. The pigeon could fly—she had tested it. In another week she would have sent it with the message that meant life to her family, but death to her own peace and happiness. But now—in her relief the last vestige of her illness fell from her. She felt strong again, ready to take up her work about the cabin. She

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found herself, for the first time, able to look normally on the smoke-grey creature, seeing it as a bird, and not as a hated, yet horribly cherished representative of the White Chief of Katleean.

It was slow work putting the old and battered whaleboat in repair. Ellen had not seen the craft since its recovery, but Shane had told her that every seam needed recalking. There was no oakum for the purpose, so she tore up some garments that neither she nor Jean could spare. He spoke casually of a cracked plank or two that would be strengthened by tacking pieces of canvas and tin both inside and out.

After several days Ellen noticed that Harlan and Kayak Bill ceased to talk of the proposed trip, although Shane still kept up a brave front and spoke confidently, in her presence at least, of landing at Katleean. She began to feel vaguely uneasy.

One morning when Jean and Lollie had gone off to gather gull eggs, which were now found in small quantities, Ellen decided to take lunch to the men who were working on the whaleboat a mile and a half away.

As she approached the spot she saw the upturned hull of the boat lying upon the sand. No one was in sight. She gasped as she saw the battered condition of the craft. One end seemed splintered and a jagged hole showed plainly in the bottom. Three other holes had been mended with tin. The next instant she was aware that the three men were sitting on the other side of the whaleboat, resting probably. Their voices floated out to her distinctly.

"We mout as well face the music, boys," Kayak

Bill was saying. "We're up against the damn'dest bit o' coast in Alasky, and in a rotten tub like this it's a ten to one chance we're takin' but——"

At this point, to Ellen's vexation, the paper containing the lunch burst apart letting half a dozen gull eggs, which formed the principal part of it, fall to the sand. Instinctively she stooped to gather them. The next words that came to her told her that Shane and Kayak were discussing the unwritten law of the North—the law of the cache. In a land where food is the god supreme, this law has made itself. White and native alike bow before it. It means life. The food cache, no matter where found, is inviolate. Than robbing a cache there is no more foul or cowardly crime. And ranked with the cache robber is the man who goes back on his promise, or fails, through neglect, to furnish food to those who depend on him. Death, Ellen knew, is the penalty for both crimes in the remote places of Alaska. As she went forward she heard the White Chief's name and some words that were unintelligible to her. Then Shane came to his feet. He was speaking in a voice toneless, dispassionate, but weighted with finality.

"I'll do it, but I don't need a gun, by God!" From his pocket he drew his revolver which he had taken that morning in the hope of getting a seal. He laid it across his other palm. "I have five shots left—but I'm going to do it with my hands on his throat!"

As he finished speaking Harlan and Kayak Bill stood up also. The young man turned and saw Ellen coming toward them. There was a moment's dissembling as

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Shane returned the pistol to his pocket, then he greeted her with a cheeriness which in no way deceived her.

She said nothing that might betray her comprehension of the situation, but as soon as she could, retraced her steps to the cabin.

She knew now that while it was in her power to prevent it she could never allow her men to put to sea in the unseaworthy whaleboat. One chance in ten, Kayak had said. Even during the best weather they had known on Kon Klayu she herself had seen a gale blow up in two hours. One chance in ten. The words repeated themselves in her brain. And if they did make the mainland—what then? "I don't need a gun. . . . I'll do it with my hands on his throat!" . . . The clash between Shane and the White Chief was inevitable now, no matter how the meeting came about. She was enough of a frontier woman to appreciate this. She would summon Kilbuck at once, before her men had a chance to risk their lives, and when she had sent her message, she would tell Shane her whole miserable story beginning with the night of the Potlatch dance. He might lose faith in her; he might despise her, but she knew that he would fight for her.

She took out pen and paper and sat before the table to write her message to the White Chief. She must make it so urgent that he would come at once before the whaleboat was launched again. She wrote several, but discarded them. At last she was satisfied. Folding the paper tightly she slipped it into the little finger of a thin kid glove she had cut off for the purpose. Then she went out to the pigeon's cage.

With the fluttering bird in her arms, she ascended the trail to the Lookout. At the top the home-made flag flung its tatters out in the sunshine. Ellen noted that it blew toward Katleean. The wind, then, was favorable. The trader should have her message by morning. And in two more days—she shook her head, not permitting herself to think further.

A few minutes she stood looking seaward. Then she held the bird out in both hands and with all her strength tossed it into the air.

Fluttering wildly, it recovered its balance, circled narrowly, rose a few feet and—settled down on the tundra before her. It took a few limping steps. Ellen was puzzled at its behavior. Perhaps she had tied the message too tightly about its leg. She would readjust it and urge the bird to flight again.

With outstretched hands she advanced toward it and tried to imprison it between her hands, but the pigeon flapped along ahead of her just out of reach. After some minutes' running back and forth over the short grass she caught it, and with her back to the flag-pole, sat down on a piece of firewood to loosen the string about the creature's leg. So intent was she on her work that she did not at once hear the sound of approaching footsteps. When she did turn her head quickly it was to look up into the anger-lighted eyes of her husband.

He reached roughly across her shoulder and with one hand grasped the pigeon by the legs. With the other he thrust toward her two pieces of thin writing paper.

"Now, perhaps, you will explain these!" he said in

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a voice that fluctuated strangely from his intense effort to control himself.

Dazed by the unexpected turn of affairs Ellen rose and mechanically took the sheets. They were two half completed notes to the White Chief—notes she had discarded. She must have overlooked them when she burned the others. What had she said in her anxiety to bring Kilbuck immediately to Kon Klayu? What had she said to arouse Shane's sleeping devil of jealousy which she had known often during the first years of their married life? "Paul Kilbuck,"—the words stood out black in her large handwriting. As she read the words she slipped the other paper over them. "I want you now——"

"So you want him *now*, do you?" Mocking fury sounded in Shane's voice. "You want him now, this fine, squaw-man lover of yours who left you to starve! God, what a blind fool I've been—but I can see it all now. I remember his whisperings to you that day we left Katleean—" He snatched the papers from her hand and thrust them into his pocket with a bitter laugh. "I'll deliver your loving message myself just before I choke—him——"

"Stop, Shane!" Suddenly Ellen was herself again. She knew nothing that had happened between her and the White Chief was one tenth as dishonorable as the things Shane's jealous imagination pictured. She stepped over to him and laid a hand on his trembling arm. "I *can* explain these half written notes," she said quietly. "I can explain everything, Shane."

She looked up into his tense, passionate face. He

must have seen something in her blue eyes that claimed him, for he asked more reasonably:

"Tell me, then."

Beginning with her distrust of the trader she did tell him. She ended with her attempt that afternoon to send the pigeon with a message urgent enough to bring the White Chief to their rescue before Shane and his partners had sailed away in the leaky whaleboat.

When she finished Shane made no comment. She waited. Was it possible he did not believe her? A long minute went by . . . and then another. . . . Obeying an impulse she did not understand she swiftly took the pigeon from him and tossed it once more into the air.

It readjusted itself and rose confidently. There was a swift movement as Shane whipped his revolver from his pocket. Before the bird had flown twenty feet he fired. The first shot missed, but the second brought the smoke-grey pigeon to the ground.

A moment later Ellen felt her husband's arms about her.

"God love you, little fellow." There was tenderness, contrition and a great relief in his tones as he laid his cheek against her hair. "Sure, nothing matters now that I know it's myself you're still in love with and not that damnable blackguard in Katleean!" . . .

For an hour they sat on the log below the flagpole, explaining, mutually forgiving, planning. Shane, with Irish logic, chose to see in the death of the pigeon, a riddance to all adverse circumstances. He seemed suddenly endowed with a new faith concerning the

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trip in the whaleboat and succeeded in imparting some of his enthusiasm to his wife.

"Luck is with me, El. I tell you I can feel it in my bones. The devil himself can't keep me from making Katleean now," he declared confidently as they walked hand in hand toward the trail that led down to the cabin.

As if fortune had at last decided in their favor, the days went sunnily by. Gulls began to lay by the thousands. Loll was relieved of his hated task of killing sea-parrots, for Harlan discovered that when the birds began to lay, he could urge them from their tunnel nests with a long stick, and capture them. The whaleboat, repaired and recalked, was launched and brought down to the beach before the cabin. All was in readiness, at last, for the journey.

The evening before they were to set sail Jean went up the hill to the Lookout to help with the last signal fire she and Gregg would build together. The night air, soft and scented, was like a caress to the senses. Sea and sky were luminous with the rose and amethyst tinting of Alaskan nights. The three plaintive descending notes of the golden-crown sounded from the alders along the crest of the hill.

When she reached the top she found a camp-fire glowing above the ashes of past flames. Gregg had preceded her and at her coming he tossed his old blanket coat to the tundra for her to sit upon. He took his place beside her. Their usual gay exchange of badinage had failed them tonight. For a time they sat silent, with arm-clasped knees, looking into the

vermillion heart of the fire. All day the shadow of approaching separation had weighed the spirits of each with heartache and anxiety. Yet each knew that in this hour tonight there was some potent quality, some indefinable magnetic thing that seemed to charge the air with sweetly mysterious emotions.

People of the cities, worn with the artificialities of civilization feel the need of some powerful stimulus to arouse emotion: Love is often born of the wine cup and a dusky, cushioned corner; of music; of the dance. When the glamour of these is removed—love dies. But inborn in the heart of every man is a love-dream—a dream of some day finding that mate who shall battle cheerfully side by side with him against environment; that mate whose courage, whose understanding, whose faith shall enable him to laugh at the buffetings of Fate and go unafraid down the years with the light of dreams in his eyes.

Perhaps with Jean and Gregg it was the subconscious knowledge of the fulfillment of this universal dream that kept them happy during all the lean months on Kon Klayu. They had shared elemental things; together they had hunted food that they might live, battled against storms, endured hardships. Together they had sung and laughed and made a playtime of it all, and slowly there had grown up between them a love as clean and wholesome as the summer winds that swept the tundra of their Island. Hitherto they had felt no need of caresses or words to express their joy in one another. They had been happy as children are happy, with no thought of tomorrow. They had parted

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each night knowing that morning would bring them together again. But now . . .

Jean, looking into the flame of the fire, dropped her chin in her cupped hands. Incongruously, it seemed to her, at that instant there flashed into her mind the memory of a day on an Island trail, when she and Gregg had come suddenly on a sea vista of heart-stopping beauty. His eyes had sought hers in quick, silent appreciation of it. She could not tell why this simple incident should suddenly seem so intangibly beautiful, but she knew now that it was a moment out of life that they two would share forever. There had been other times when they had sung together under the golden winter stars—fleeting, rapturous spaces when she had been conscious that not only their voices, but in some way their spirits blended. But now . . . he was going away into the gravest danger—into death perhaps. . . .

She overcame a quick impulse to reach out, to feel him under her hands, to hold him back.

Gregg rose to place another log on the fire. He brushed his hands one against the other and thrust them deep into his pockets. She felt his dark eyes compelling her own, and raised her face from her hands. Neither spoke, but for a long tempestuous moment they looked at each other. Something perilously sweet and magnetic drew her. Even as she rose Gregg was at her side. She felt his arms close about her with eager tenderness. She stood against him within his hold, tremulous, thrilling to his nearness, yet even in the ecstasy of it, realizing that their separation was now made more poignantly unbearable.

"Jean . . . " a little hoarsely he said her name, and she was aware that his heart was beating as wildly as her own. "Jean, you—you are so dear to me! When I come back, could you—will you marry me?"

His arms tightened about her as his head bent to hers. In answer she raised her face to his, and in the first joyous enchantment of young love met his kiss.

Two hours later she lay in her little bunk steeped in glad tumultuous memories of those last moments on the Lookout. Her spirit fared forth on the wings of her love into the future—a future made beautiful beyond her girlish dreams. She told herself it was not possible that other men and women loved as she and Gregg; not Ellen and Shane, . . . not anyone. . . . All at once she became conscious that in the living-room her sister and brother-in-law were still talking, though everyone else had long since gone to bed. The indistinct murmur of their voices mingled with the metallic clicking sound that informed her Shane was again oiling his revolver. Then his words came to her with low distinctness:

"El, I'm going to leave this with you. There are three cartridges left in it, and if—if—I don't come back and no help comes to you before another winter . . . you know—little fellow—you know what to do."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE JUSTICE OF THE SEA

BECAUSE there is no night in the Northland in June, dawn on Kon Klayu was but a tender merging of golden twilight into amber and rose and blue, with the sun reappearing within an hour of his setting, kissing the summer sea into sparking sheets of silver and jade. The little green Island with its girdle of creaming surf had never seemed so beautiful as in the early morning of the day Shane and Kayak and Harlan sailed away in search of help. The electricity of adventure, of hope was in the air, and the wind was as soft and balmy as a breath from tropic seas.

After the last good-bye had been said, Ellen, Jean and Loll stood on the beach below the cabin watching the little whaleboat riding the long, gentle swells just outside the line of breakers. The tin patches on the frail sides glinted bravely in the sunshine, the mended old Christopher Columbus sail caught the breeze, and slenderly outlined against it were the forms of Shane and Harlan waving a cheerful farewell to the watchers. Kayak Bill, his hand on the tiller and his face turned resolutely away, headed the pathetic craft out into the

treacherously smiling North Pacific and laid his course for Katleean.

The boat was slowly lost in the sunny silver distance, and the sisters, arm in arm, turned and listlessly followed the trail back to the cabin. Lollie walking on ahead, brushed the tears from his eyes and squared his narrow shoulders as if already he had assumed the responsibilities of the man of the family.

The door of the cabin stood open and the sun made a great rectangle of light on the floor. It was very quiet—and lonely. The loneliness was new to both women and it hurt like a pain in their souls. It seemed impossible that nowhere on the Island were the men to whom they were so accustomed.

Ellen began picking up the dishes which were standing as she had left them after the early breakfast. Jean helped her. When the work was over there seemed nothing left but the aching emptiness of waiting.

The long day wore away at last. Tomorrow, if the wind held favorable and all went well, Ellen and Jean assured each other repeatedly, the whaleboat would reach Katleean, and in two more days a ship might come for them.

At twilight Jean climbed alone to the Lookout. The sunny day had faded in a grey mist. Afar down toward the south cliffs the tree so like a waiting woman stood out against it in weird, life-like appeal. The flat desolation of the plateau was marked by the tundra trail that led across the Island to the Hut—the trail along which Gregg had so often come to meet her.

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She had not dreamed that life could hold so much of emptiness nor that longing for a loved one could be so intense as to be almost a physical pain. She sank down beside the dull ashes of last night's fire. The loneliness was almost unbearable.

From the pocket in her blouse she took a folded paper. Gregg had pressed it into her hand as he left that morning. She unfolded it. It was a verse from some poet unknown to her. "Read it when I am gone," he had whispered to her.

"When I am standing on a mountain crest,
Or hold the tiller in the dashing spray,
My love of you leaps foaming in my breast,
Shouts with the winds and sweeps to their foray;
. . . I laugh aloud for love of you,
Glad that our love is fellow to rough weather—
No fretful orchid hothoused from the dew,
But hale and hardy as the highland heather,
Rejoicing in the wind that stings and thrills,
Comrade of the ocean, playmate of the hills."

Before Jean had finished, her shoulders had straightened. She felt strangely comforted, lifted out of herself. Surely, she thought, nothing but happiness could come of a love like this. Even the elements must be kind to one who loved so. Back in her little bunk she thought of him out on the dark sea in an open boat with only the night for a covering, and to calm her fears she repeated over and over again the words of the verse he had left her.

Her faith was sorely tried the next morning when

she woke to the old familiar roar of wind and wave, and felt the cabin trembling in the blasts of a gale. She saw, with alarm, that Ellen was not in her bed. On investigating, Jean found her out on the beach standing bareheaded while the wind wound her garments about her, loosening the strands of her braided hair and pelting her with rain and flying spray. Ellen was gazing, in a fascination of dread, at the green-back waves humping their backs like fearful monsters, chasing one another in to the line of foaming breakers that spent themselves at her feet.

Jean slipped her hand into her sister's and drew her back to the cabin. When they entered Loll was up making a fire in the Yukon stove.

The day wore on. The storm increased, though it never became as violent as some they had experienced during the winter. The direction of the wind was favorable to their sailors. Both women knew that no make-shift craft could live in such a sea, yet they hoped with an intensity akin to despair that Shane had made the shelter of Katleean Bay before the full fury of the storm was reached.

Night came on darker than usual, low scudding clouds and flying wavetops seeming to mingle. Waves sheeted with foam faded ghost-like into the tossing greyness. Drifts of rain blew stingingly in from the sea. Cruel and cold the waters appeared now to Jean's anxious eyes, and she found herself repeating again the lines of Gregg's verse, as if it had become the tenets of her faith.

The second day of the storm passed as did the first,

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except that evening brought a surcease of rain. The clouds in the west began to lift. The sisters drawn closer by their common, mounting dread, slept together that night, one on each side of Loll.

It was long before sleep visited Jean. But presently she was dreaming that she dangled at the end of a rope over the cliff above the cavern, trying to snatch nuggets from the rocky ledges. The wind blew her body hither and thither, as she clutched the jutting crags. She tried vainly to secure a foot or hand-hold. From above Gregg's voice was calling, calling her plaintively, weirdly. She tried to make out his words but could not. The wind blew them far away, and only a faint, wild "Awh-hoo-oo-oo-oo!" came to her. Then her rope began to slip and she was falling, falling interminably past the face of the precipice, past shags' nests, past thousands of flapping birds who shrieked tauntingly at her. With a convulsive movement she tried to spring to the rock shelf below her—tried so hard that she woke trembling and in a cold perspiration of dream-fear, with her heart pumping so loudly that she could hear it.

The wind had died down and only the muffled beating of the great combers on far seaward bars was audible, but—of a sudden she was bolt upright in bed, listening with every sense alert. On the island, where they three were the only human beings, someone, *something* was calling. Above the sound of the sea it came—the haunting, long-drawn cry of her dream:

"Awh-oo-oo-oo! Awh-oo-oo-oo!"

But this was no dream. The cry came again, one minute apparently from the depths of the ocean, then from the Lookout above the cabin. It came nearer, growing more appalling, more mysterious in its possibilities. It filled her with fearful, inchoate imaginings. . . .

In an agony of terror she reached out and shook her sister's shoulder.

"Ellen! Ellen!" she whispered tensely. "Listen! Some one is calling!"

Ellen awakened out of a belated sleep, raised on her elbow and tossed the long loose hair from her face.

Again came the unearthly: "Awh-hoo-oo-oo!" rising thin and high and dying away on the falling inflection.

Ellen's face went paler as she listened. She lingered a moment, then sprang out of bed. Slipping her hand beneath her pillow she drew forth the revolver and started for the door. Jean crawled gently over the sleeping Lollie and followed.

They stood on the porch in the freshness of the dawn searching the familiar landscape for some sign of life. The storm had cleared away and long scarf-like clouds streaked the intense blue above. Once out in the open Jean's mind was cleared of its phantoms. But a sudden shock went through her when, from just over the bank, the call came again.

Almost immediately there appeared in the trail the strange, tottering form of a man. He advanced haltingly as if spent from some long struggle, his bare, black head sunk on his chest, his damp garments clinging to him.

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"Stop!" Ellen's voice rang out. "Tell me who you are and where you are from!"

The man raised his head. At the sight of the two women standing in their white robes, their loose hair floating about them, a spasm of mortal terror crossed his dark face.

"*Kus-ta-ka! Kus-ta-ka!*"* he yelled, at the same time throwing up his arms and turning to run weakly down the trail.

Ellen covered the staggering figure with her revolver, but Jean caught her hand. "Don't, El! Be careful!" she cried breathlessly. "Can't you see—it's our old friend! It's Swimming Wolf from Katleean!"

She sprang along the trail after him calling: "Wolf! Oh, Swimming Wolf! Don't run away from us! Don't you know your friends?"

The man terrified by something, she knew not what, kept up his feeble running gait. She overtook him and grasped his shirt. The big Indian collapsed on the sand. His hand closed painfully over her arm while his wild black eyes searched her face. At the touch his look gave place to one of relief.

"Ugh! Little squaw with white feet!" he gasped. "Swimming Wolf think you all the same dead—think all you people dead. Long time you have no grub." He pinched her arm again as if to reassure himself that she was flesh and blood and not the *kus-ta-ka*, the ghost he had thought her. He continued: "Long time now, Swimming Wolf no grub too." He opened his mouth and pointed a shaking finger down his throat.

* Ghost.

"No grub, no water, no sleep, t'ree day." He held up three fingers turning his head slowly from side to side. "T'ree day lost. Plenty tired."

His voice was weary, plaintive, as only an Indian voice can be. Jean wondered how she had for one instant attributed his Indian cry to supernatural powers—she who had often heard him calling to members of his tribe along the shores of Katleean.

Noting his weak condition, the girl checked the eager questions that rose to her lips, and when Ellen came up, between them they managed to get the worn man to the cabin. They fed him bread and hot sea-parrot broth. He ate ravenously as much as Ellen thought good for him, but when she tried to induce him to lie down in Kayak Bill's bunk, he shook his head, and started unsteadily for the door.

"No, no!" he said sharply. "You come along. Other man with Swimming Wolf."

They followed him down the trail to the beach and turned with him toward Sunset Point. He paid no attention to their eager questions, but suddenly stopped and pointed ahead. In the maw of the surf inside the Point a whaleboat was churning. At the sight of it cries of alarm broke from the women's throats, but again the Indian shook his head.

"Him not there," he assured them. "Him up *there*!" He indicated the high-tide-line. He lurched along beside them, intent on taking them to where his friend lay.

They saw the still dark form lying prone on the edge of the rice-grass where Swimming Wolf had dragged

it. Ellen, with a bottle of water and some bread in her hand, ran forward toward the prostrate man. Within a few feet of him, Jean saw her check herself and shrink back. Then, reluctantly the girl thought, she went on. Jean quickened her pace.

As she approached Ellen turned swiftly to her.

"Jean!" she said hardly above her breath. "Look!"

Jean gazed with incredulous eyes into the face on the sand. The black beard was matted with seawater. Below the bandaged forehead two weary grey eyes opened. A moment a faint look of surprise crept into them. Then they closed again and the man lay still as death.

"Oh-o-o!" Jean's voice held an uncontrollable quiver. "Oh-o-o! It's the White Chief of Katleean!"

CHAPTER XXXII

BENEATH THE BLOOD-RED SUN

A WEEK had gone by since the day the White Chief and Swimming Wolf had been cast up on the shores of Kon Klayu. The women, with the help of the Indian, had lifted the inert form of the dazed man to a mattress at the spot where they had found him, and dragged it literally inch by inch along the beach to the cabin. They put him to bed in Kayak's bunk in the little room off the living-room.

For Ellen and Jean the days were filled with intangible doubt and mounting fear, for no sail whitened off Kon Klayu. Added to the acute anxiety in regard to their men was now the problem of the White Chief of Katleean. What queer twist of Fate had tossed the trader, helpless and without food, on the Island where his very life depended on those he had left to starve? And, if their men were lost at sea, what would happen to them when Kilbuck recovered his strength?

Gradually, from the disjointed utterances of the superstitious Indian and from their own knowledge of the trader, they were able to piece together the story of the White Chief's mishap,—not the story as Swimming Wolf knew it, tinged with eerie Thlinget super-

stition and mystery—but the prosaic version of the white man, who sees everything through logical eyes, and is ever explaining away all that is mysterious in life and much that is interesting.

The White Chief, sometimes going for months without liquor, had, as they knew, periods when he drank as no other man in all Alaska. Curiously enough, he never gave way to his desire while at Katleean, but with one faithful native to attend him, he would go aboard some visiting vessel, and there sink himself into the oblivion brought about by quantities of hootch.

It was in the latter part of May that a schooner, the *Silver Fox*, came to anchor in the Bay of Katleean. The owner and captain was a German, bound for Cook's Inlet with a load of gasoline and enough equipment to start an illicit still at Turn-again-arm. Paul Kilbuck, after nearly a year of abstinence, succumbed to his craving, and with Swimming Wolf, sought the cabin of the *Silver Fox*. After two days of the German's liquid hospitality, he was ready for any mad adventure. Doubtless the thought of Ellen and her family must have been with him during the winter. Perhaps he had some inchoate drunken plan of seeking her when he put to sea with the potvaliant captain of the *Silver Fox*; but six hours from the post he collapsed in a stupor on the captain's bunk.

Tales of the North are replete with instances of the incredible recklessness of men drunk on the pale liquor of that land—men who, sailing along the dangerous coast, lash the wheels of their vessels, and leaving all sail set, go below for a day's carousal; men who drain

the very liquid from the compass to satisfy their burning thirst when hootch is gone. So it was no surprise to the women to learn that the storm which swept the Island so soon after the departure of the three men, had broken upon the *Silver Fox* when all hands, except the faithful Swimming Wolf, were too far gone in drink to man the craft.

As he talked, the Indian, with expressive eyes and hands, acted out each step of his story. He told how the wind increased; how he lashed the wheel and all alone tried to reef the bellying canvass, letting it fall as it would at last. With a few words and many dramatic gestures, he made known how the trader, roused from a two-day stupor by the pitching of the vessel and the banging of the boom sticks, had staggered up out of the cabin, and been struck by the heavily swinging boom of the mainsail.

The captain and the three sailors crawled to the deck soon after, where the freshness of the rising gale undoubtedly cleared their brains somewhat. They tried to make things ship-shape to weather the storm. The captain was just about to cut the tow-line that still bound the trader's whaleboat to the stern of the *Silver Fox*, when suddenly volumes of black smoke came pouring out of the cabin.

Swimming Wolf was never able to give a white man's reason which would explain the fire that started in the hold of the schooner where the gasoline was stored. He swore it was the *kus-ta-ka* who kindled the flame, the *kus-ta-ka* who knocked the White Chief on the head and made him fall "all same dead." That

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he finally got the trader into the whaleboat and escaped the burning vessel while the crew departed in their own small boat was evident. There was but one oar, and the craft was blown hither and thither on the tossing sea at the wind's will. In the dawn of the third day Swimming Wolf had been able to beach it on the rocky shore off which he found himself.

The Indian had no idea where he was landing, and when he saw the white-robed figures appear on the rickety porch of the cabin, it was not surprising that he thought them ghosts.

Further questioning of Swimming Wolf revealed the fact that at Katleean, two drunken sailors had run the *Hoonah* ashore in the lagoon on one of the highest tides of the fall. Though uninjured, it would have required some work to get the little craft off again; so there, evidently, she had remained.

"But Swimming Wolf, why didn't the White Chief get another boat and come with our provisions? Why didn't the Indians come for us? Didn't anyone care whether we starved or not?"

The Wolf looked at Ellen with that stolid, blank expression an Indian assumes when he does not wish to be questioned.

"Me dun know. Me dun know." He shook his head. "Indian have no boat. Kilbuck, he Big Chief. He all time say: 'Mind you business or Indian get no grub. Tomorrow I go.'" He all time say 'Tomorrow.'

Tomorrow! From the lips of Kayak Bill who knew his Alaska, Ellen and Jean knew what tragedies lie

behind that word. From waiting on wind and tide and the next steamer to go someplace, from waiting on summer or winter to do something, from waiting on an indifferent government to act on something, people of the North have found that Alaska has become essentially a Land of Tomorrow! A month in Alaska becomes as a day in the States.

Humanity demanded that the two women do their best for the man who had brought about their present perilous situation, though he had forfeited all claim to womanly sympathy. Ellen could not bring herself to go near the White Chief after he was placed in Kayak's bunk, but she directed Swimming Wolf, who nursed and fed him. At first Kilbuck lay in a stupor, but suddenly, at the end of twenty-four hours, he came out of his daze. Jean, going into his room, encountered his narrow grey eyes looking up at her with their normal expression.

He recovered quickly from the blow on the head, and on a diet of bread and broth rapidly regained his strength. The women avoided him whenever possible, but Loll, on whom once more they were dependent for sea-parrots, found time to sit beside him, asking about his friends at Katleean, and in turn telling the trader all his small affairs of the day. As time went by he must have given the man a fair idea of the struggle for existence during the winter on Kon Klayu.

Kilbuck, for the most part, was silent. He made no effort to explain his failure to keep his promises. His strange, grey eyes, whenever it was possible, followed the movements of Ellen and Jean. Sometimes the

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women could hear him, indistinctly, questioning Lollie.

The fourth day Swimming Wolf assisted him to the porch where he sat looking a long time at the sun-kissed sea. The fifth day, with the Indian's help, he took a walk on the beach. What he thought of the situation Ellen and Jean had no means of knowing, but as they watched him rapidly regaining his old arrogant manner, vague fears crept insiduously into their minds. At the end of the week he was issuing his orders to Swimming Wolf with all the ease and certainty of one in supreme command.

One afternoon Ellen sat on the porch trying to piece together the remnants of a little shirt for Loll. Jean and the boy were off with Swimming Wolf gathering food. The White Chief had gone to his room some time before. Ellen's heart was heavy with anxiety for her husband. If he were alive, he should by now have returned to her. If he were dead. . . . For some minutes she was oblivious to all about her as she strove to thrust this thought from her mind. The incipient menace of the White Chief's presence hovered about her, though so far he had never by word or look betrayed any sentimental interest in her since his advent on the Island. Perhaps by now, she told herself hopefully, time and his illness had changed him for the better. Perhaps——

Something caused her to turn her head toward the cabin door back of her. Against the portal stood the White Chief. His hand was hooked beneath his scarlet belt in the old familiar manner. His narrow, pale eyes were fastened upon her in a way she had known in

Katleean. She felt suddenly that he had taken in every detail of her appearance—her heavy braided hair, her worn and faded blouse, her short ragged skirt, and her feet incased in home-made moccasins of canvas. She felt a rush of hot blood rising to her hair. He noted it and smiled, his sardonic, thin-lipped smile. The peculiar warmth that crept into his eyes caused Ellen's heart to contract with a realization of appalling possibilities. A small, inward panic took possession of her.

She rose abruptly and ran swiftly up the hillside trail to the Lookout. She knew now that she was not dealing with a sick man. She and her sister were practically at the mercy of Paul Kilbuck.

She resolved to keep her suspicions from Jean as long as possible, but that evening as they were sitting together in the living-room, after Lollie had climbed into bed, the girl kept glancing apprehensively toward the closed door that shut off the sleeping place of the trader.

"Ellen," she said, hardly above a whisper. "I don't think he's as ill now as he would have us believe." She nodded toward the closed door. "We ought to ask him to move over to the Hut with Swimming Wolf now. . . . Ellen—I'm growing dreadfully afraid of him. . . . Oh!" She started nervously at a sound from the other room.

"I wish we had some way of locking that door." In a low voice Ellen thus admitted her own uneasiness, while her gaze wandered about the room. "We might put the table in front of it, and then if he did try to come through in the night, we would hear him."

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Cautiously the two women lifted the table and placed the inadequate barrier across the door.

"From now on, Jean, only one of us will sleep, while the other watches—just to be ready, you know. If he makes one suspicious move—" she broke off and patted almost lovingly the revolver she had drawn from an inside pocket of her blouse.

Noting the look of fear that had crept into Jean's eyes since her suspicions had been confirmed, Ellen added: "But it won't be much longer, Jeanie, this waiting. Surely Shane will come in a day or two. It's nearly the twenty-first of June."

The twenty-first of June, the longest and most beautiful day of the year in the North, was also the anniversary of Ellen's wedding. Never during the last ten years had Shane forgotten it. Never had he failed to bring her some little surprise, to arrange some extra pleasure for her. For the past two weeks this thought had been with Ellen constantly, comforting her, promising her. By some complex, womanish process she had come to believe that on the twenty-first of June Shane, if alive, *must* come to her. As she and Jean lay awake whispering during the long, light nights, she had instilled some of her faith into the girl's mind. If they could but keep the trader from any untoward action until then, they both felt that all would be well.

During the days that followed the sisters never left each other's side. Swimming Wolf and Lollie procured the food. The Wolf chopped the wood and attended to other like duties about the cabin. The White

Chief did nothing, except lounge on Kayak's bunk. In response to Ellen's suggestion that he move to the Hut on the other side of the Island he had merely looked into her eyes and smiled.

Since recovering his strength he had begun to take long walks about the beaches. Ellen feared that sometime he might come upon their cavern and learn the secret of the gold of Kon Klayu, but Jean assured her that there was no approach from either side of the precipice. The only way to the cave lay by way of the cleft.

As time dragged on the strain of uncertainty became almost more than the women could bear. Sometimes as they sat about the table eating the wild food which was their only sustenance now, Ellen could hardly control her impulse to hurl at the enigmatic man opposite her the questions that rose to her lips. Why was he so silent? For what was he waiting? What did he think of their situation? What did he mean to do with them?

She realized that they could not go on indefinitely as they were now. *Something* must happen to relieve the tension. She had reached a point where any word, any action that might give her a clew to the trader's intentions, was welcome. She began to long intensely that he might do something which would give her an excuse to use the revolver she carried constantly beneath her blouse.

But beyond looks and an occasional cryptic smile, he did nothing to alarm either of the women. Yet his very silence and inaction were more ominous than

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threats. He instilled in them a crawling dread, a growing terror and uncertainty that was worse than anything they had hitherto known.

The twenty-first of June dawned beautiful and clear. It had been Ellen's turn to watch all night and she was a-stir early, happier and more cheerful than she had been for months. Today—today Shane must come. She was sure he would come. He had never failed her. She woke Jean and Loll, and with that undying instinct which prompts every true woman to make a feast for her returning man, Ellen prepared an extra amount of the poor fare at her command: gumboot hash, boiled eggs and sea-parrot.

Shortly after the mid-day meal the White Chief, now fully recovered, went off with Swimming Wolf in the direction of the south cliffs. Ellen with her sister and Lollie climbed hopefully to the Lookout to begin their watching.

In the bright sunshine the sea below heaved gently and stretched away to the horizon where, today, the dim outline of the amethyst range showed. Afar out the smoke of a west-bound steamer smudged the sky faintly, lending a suggestion of human nearness to the scene that cheered the waiting ones. Nearly three weeks had gone by since the men had left the Island, and the weather, with the exception of the one storm, had been calm. Today, certainly, Shane would come—if he were alive.

Eagerly, hopefully they talked of his arrival as they sat scanning the ocean toward Katleean. The soft breeze died away. The sea took on the smooth shim-

mer of undulating satin. From afternoon down to sunset the day grew in beauty.

Time went by and the passing of each hour lessened somewhat the measure of their blind faith and hope. Their talk became desultory. The blue and silver of afternoon gave way to the blue and gold of approaching evening. The tide came in and the amber sky took on the luminous tints of rose and jade, cobalt and orange. The heaving, chameleon sea, unruffled by a breath of wind, gave back the colors quivering, burnished, opalescent, like the bowl of an abalone shell. They, on the Lookout, felt themselves alone inside the tinted bubble of the world. Ellen's day was waning in an enthralling splendor that rendered the watchers speechless; it numbed them by its exquisite beauty so incongruous with their own growing sense of hopelessness. Ellen's day was waning, and yet there was no sign of Shane.

From the pole on the Lookout the home-made flag hung in pathetic bleached tatters, like lifeless grey hair down the back of an old woman. Beneath it, on driftwood left over from the signal fires, sat the watchers. A faint breath from the dead ashes mingled with the freshness of the evening air and added an indefinable touch of loneliness. Little Loll, tired out from his long, vain watching, curled up against Ellen's knee and went to sleep. Shags, dark and witch-like against the glowing sky, flew in long, low lines toward the cliffs. There was no sound except the eternal murmur of the surf.

The opal tints deepened, . . . then faded to a dull amethyst. Just above the line of the sea the blood-red

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sun stood out against the haze like an immense weirdly-luminous balloon. The women watched it sinking, . . . sinking. It seemed pregnant with awesome, universal mysteries—this dully-growing crimson ball of the sun whose descent marked the close of the day.

“Oh, Jeanie, Jeanie!” Suddenly the low cry quivered on the hush of the night. Ellen’s brave spirit had succumbed at last to the awful, beautiful, loneliness. She sank her head on her sister’s shoulder and clasping her arms about Jean, vainly tried to still the surge of grief that shook her.

“Jeanie!” she sobbed. “He’s dead. Shane—my husband—is dead! If—if he were living—he would have come—to me—today!”

The tattered flag on the pole above stirred to an awakening breeze. . . . The midnight sun touched the rim of the sea, and lingered to kiss with blood-red lips the cruel waters that have taken many men. . . . Then it doubled back on its track and slowly, perceptibly, rose again, as if reluctant to lose sight of the lonely Lookout where Lollie, fully awake now, was trying to gather two sobbing women into his thin, little-boy arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ANCHORS WEIGHED

AN hour later, Ellen, worn out by the vigil of the night before and the long watching on the Look-out, lay on the blankets of her bed fully dressed. Lollie slumbered beside her, his tumbled red head in the crook of his arm. It was Jean's night to watch, and she sat before the table, the revolver ready to her hand. Her shoulders drooped and her eyes were heavy-lidded and swollen from weeping. She rested her elbows on the table and dropped her face in her hands. Numbed by their grief and disappointment, both women for the time being had relaxed their caution, and for the first time in days, the table had not been placed across the closed door of the White Chief's room.

For an hour the girl sat immovable. . . . Then she glanced up at the clock. It had stopped. Ellen had forgotten to wind it. Jean wondered dully how they were now to tell the time. There was no other timepiece on the Island. But time didn't matter. Nothing mattered now. She dropped her face again in her hands. . . . Her head was very heavy. . . . Her arms slipped slowly until they rested on the table. . . . Her head settled forward until it lay upon them. . . . There

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came a long, tired sigh, and then the regular breathing of the sleeper. . . .

The sun of late morning was streaming in through the little north window when the door off the living-room softly opened. The tall figure of the White Chief stood a moment as he looked in at the quiet forms before him. A gleam of triumph showed in his narrow eyes as they came to rest on the pistol lying before the dark bowed head of the girl at the table. His nostrils twitched and his lip lifted in his wolfish smile. He tip-toed cautiously until his avid hand closed on the weapon.

In the middle of the room he paused, and with an air of satisfaction turned it over and over in his hands. There was a movement on the bed in the corner, and abruptly Ellen sat upright, her wide gaze on the man before her.

"Good morning!" He smiled at her derisively. His instinct for effective poses asserting itself, he began showing off his aptitude with the revolver. He twirled it, with elaborate carelessness, on his trigger finger, and with one movement of his wrist, stopped it, at the same time drawing a bead on the shining gold-scales above the window.

"I've been trying to get my hands on this for days," he said conversationally, turning to her again. "Your aim is a little too sure for me to take any chances." He looked at the weapon in his hand. "You know, my dear, I have never really believed in that popular fallacy concerning women and force—that a club and long hair go together. Still, you never can tell. . . .

As a persuader this is a bit better than a club, but—" he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, "I'll not need it—here." He extracted the three cartridges from the revolver and tossed it easily to the bed.

"Oh-o-o Ellen!" Jean's despairing voice struck through the room as she woke and found the pistol gone.

The trader glanced from one to the other. "I am indeed a fortunate man," he laughed, "to be cast upon an island with *two* charming women. Some might think it an embarrassment of riches—but I. . . ." He allowed a significant silence to sink in.

Ellen had risen from the bed and stood beside her sister, a hand resting protectingly on the girl's shoulder. The White Chief crossed to the table and seated himself on the edge of it, one foot swinging free.

"You're both going to think a lot of me before we're taken off Kon Klayu," he told them. "Oh, yes, we'll be taken off, my dears, but not by your husband, Mrs. Boreland." He ignored Ellen's cry and proceeded: "I was a little afraid the first week that he might, by sheer Irish luck, have escaped the storm and be turning up here—but it's too late now. I'll wager you're a widow."

He seemed to be enjoying himself immensely as his pale eyes lingered first on one and then on the other woman before him.

"The pale white rose, and the dewy red bud," his vibrant voice went on mockingly. "Oh, do not be alarmed—" as they both shrank back—"I'm not going to be crude. I have plenty of time—plenty of time—

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Oh, you *would*, would you!" He broke off with a sudden snarl, as Ellen, infuriated by his manner, snatched up the empty revolver and hurled it with all her strength at his head.

He dodged, and with one panther-like movement, leaped at her, his arms closing like a vice about her shoulders.

As if maddened by her struggles he crushed her to him and pinioning her wrists in one powerful hand, he embedded the other in her loose hair and brutally drew her head back until her face was upturned to his. A moment he bent above her, crouching, feral, then he thrust his dark bearded face against hers and shut off her screams.

At the first intimation of the man's violence Jean had rushed to her sister's aid and was beating him with wildly impotent hands, calling despairingly to Lollie, to Swimming Wolf, even to Gregg. Then like a young tigress she sprang at him from behind trying to get a hold on his neck so that she might drag him from Ellen.

But the man was impervious to everything outside the circle of his arms.

"Oh, Swimming Wolf! Oh, help! Help us!" Jean's desperate screams rang out again as she heard the sound of hasty footsteps on the porch outside.

She leaped for the door, but before her hand touched the latch it was flung open and against the blinding sunshine loomed the tall figure of Shane Boreland.

With one bound he crossed the living-room. There came the sound of a blow, . . . struggling, . . . a sudden choked cry, and Shane's gasping words:

"God . . . you cur . . . come . . . in the open . . . I'll kill you!"

Two writhing, panting figures reeled about the living-room. . . . They broke. . . . Shane, livid with rage, side-stepped, and with the agility of a wild-cat leaped again at his adversary. His arm encircled and tightened about the trader's neck. Kilbuck turned in the grip and chest to chest they swayed, strained, their tentative blows rendered impotent by their very nearness to each other. With twistings of legs and sudden saggings of bodies they sought to get each other prostrate. The hot breath whistling from their gaping mouths made the only human sounds. Wheeling, lurching they fought swiftly about the room, knocking over chairs, . . . the table . . . sweeping the stove from its foundation. Then Shane's ankle turned as his foot encountered the fallen revolver, and he lost his balance.

In that instant the trader had him down—was upon him, slugging viciously with both fists. From the first there was no science in the fight. Both men inflamed—one with a long-denied passion for revenge, the other with hatred for one he had wronged, had reverted to the primitive lust to gouge, to claw, to kill with bare hands. They rolled about the floor, first one on top, then the other, striking, tearing at each other's throats, their very blind fury defeating their purpose. . . . Again a turn found them on their feet, and like snarling beasts they bounded back to the attack. Shirts were torn from their backs, warm, gummy blood on their sweating bared bodies rendered their grips inse-

cure. . . . After what seemed to the watchers a frenzied eternity, their efforts began slowly to slacken. Their grips became more feeble, their hoarse rasping gasps for breath more labored. . . . The Chief attempted groggily to dodge a blow. Shane recovered his balance, rushed him low, and closed. A moment they swayed together, then slowly the trader was lifted off his feet; a sudden twist of Shane's shoulders, a heave, and the Chief was slammed against the edge of the overturned table, his arm striking heavily. Even as he went down Shane was on top of him, his hands fastened in a death grip about Kilbuck's throat. The man's face began to turn purple, his pale narrow eyes widened slowly, horribly until they seemed starting from the sockets.

Then Jean screamed.

"Gregg! Kayak! Stop him! Don't let him commit murder!"

The sound of the girl's voice broke the spell that had bound the spectators standing in the doorway. Kayak Bill and Harlan strode into the cabin and between them tore Boreland from his enemy and placed him on the bed in the corner, where Ellen and Lollie took charge of him. The insensible White Chief was carried into the next room and put in Kayak's bunk. Breathing heavily from exertion Kayak Bill stepped back to look at him.

"That lyin' skunk's so crooked he cain't lay straight in bed, Gregg. I was honin' somethin' powerful to horn in on that little shindy—but I reckon Shane's bunged him up conside'ble," he drawled with immense

satisfaction, as he leaned over and felt the trader's arm. " 'Pears like he's got a busted flipper, and I know his noggin is sure addled. Get some water, Gregg. I mout as well bring the durned squaw-pirate back to life, 'cause when he's well again, I aim to knock hell outen him myself——"

Kayak turned to find that his remarks had fallen on the empty air, for Gregg and Jean, standing amid the ruins of the dish cupboard, were oblivious to all the world except each other. His hazel eyes roved to the bed where Ellen and Loll were welcoming Shane as if he had returned from the dead. Kayak stood a moment.

" 'Pears like I'm playin' a lone hand here," he said wistfully as he started for the water that was to revive the White Chief.

"Oh, Kayak! Kayak!" came Lollie's shout as he burrowed out from between his parents. "It's your turn now to get some lovin'. Wait a minute!" And the little fellow sprang from one end of the bed into Kayak's arms. A second later both Ellen and Jean were welcoming him with a warmth of affection that sent his new sombrero flying and made his old hair-seal waistcoat slip half-way off his shoulders. Delighted but unprepared for such demonstrations, Kayak was at a loss how to meet them. His cheeks turned fiery red, and though his eyes were glowing he backed away the moment they released him and began earnestly to readjust his worn waistcoat.

"By he—hen, Lady," he managed to say with some semblance of his old nonchalance, as he fumbled with

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a torn buttonhole. "I—I—" he glared accusingly at the hair-seal garment, "I believe this durned thing is—is—is a-sufferin' from poverty o' the buttons, or—or maybe enlargement o' the buttonholes!" And in the laughter that greeted his statement he went off to care for the White Chief.

Joy in the reunion and an hour's rest put Shane on his feet again. While the women gathered up their few belongings, they learned how the old whale-boat in which the men had left Kon Klayu had held together, seemingly by a miracle, during the first part of the storm, but later had been driven out of its course. When Shane finally landed at a cannery fifty miles from Katleean the boat was abandoned and they were taken to the trading post in the canoes of some fishing Indians. There they learned of the White Chief's trip on the *Silver Fox* and set about getting the *Hoonah* off the beach at the lagoon. The tides of June being higher than usual they had little trouble, but it took days to calk the seams and put the schooner in shape for the trip.

"We were within fifty miles of here yesterday when the wind died down, El," Shane told his wife, "and myself doing my best to make it on our wedding anniversary! I knew you'd be expecting me, little fellow." He patted her hand. "Well," he continued after some strictly personal remarks, "I suppose we'll have to take Kilbuck to a doctor before we go to Katleean—damn him, I ought to kill him, though. There's an M.D. at the cannery this summer. I want the blackguard fixed up so I can settle with him later." He drew a

new corn cob from his pocket and cramming it with tobacco, lit it. "But I tell you, girls," he went on between puffs of the keenest enjoyment, "Kayak and I had the biggest surprise of our lives the day before we left Katleean!" He turned to Gregg and made a ludicrous confidential attempt to wink a swollen eye. "A cannery steamer put in and landed no less person than his royal nibs—the president of the Alaska Fur and Trading Company!"

This announcement was received with no particular enthusiasm by either of his listeners. He went on:

"We got close as paving bricks right off the reel, and he's going to finance the mining of Kon Klayu!" He stopped to note the effect of this statement. "We left him at the post looking into the business methods of the White Chief. The cannery steamer will be back in ten days and we'll all strike out for San Francisco together and get our outfit. We'll be back here at Kon Klayu this fall to begin operations." There was a dismayed exclamation from Ellen; a delighted one from Jean. "Oh, cheer up, El," he said to his wife. "You and I won't have to come unless we want to. We've already appointed the old man's son resident manager. He wants the job—is crazy about it in fact. Turn around girls, and I'll present him to you—Mr. Gregg Harlan, ladies!" With a grand flourish Shane indicated the flushing young man. "Why he chose to keep it a secret all these months, he hasn't told us yet, but—perhaps Jean will find out!" Laughing at the incredulous look on Ellen's face he limped out to the shed

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where Kayak Bill was doing up samples of ore to take aboard the *Hoonah* lying just off the bluff.

At midnight the schooner was rippling gently over the long swells into an atmosphere of golden sunset light that flooded the sky and crinkled along the wave-tops in shimmering, mellow orange. Up in the bow of the *Hoonah* silhouetted against the glow, old Kayak Bill stood alone. In his hazel eyes was the wistful look that crept there sometimes when he watched the domestic happiness of those about him. A-top the cabin by the mainmast Jean and Gregg stood looking back over the lengthening stretch of water. Kon Klayu lay, an oblong of jade in the amber light, ringed with a wreath of foam. A single gull winnowed across the vision calling a wistful question, and from the Lookout the tattered flag flung itself out on the breeze as if in farewell. Jean's happy voice came to him from where she was snuggled in the circle of Harlan's arm.

Kayak Bill let his gaze wander to the stern where Shane and Ellen stood together at the wheel: Despite Boreland's battered countenance his chin was up in his old jaunty and debonaire manner. The wind ruffled the hair on his bare head. One hand managed the steering gear. The other arm lay across his wife's shoulders.

Kayak, watching shook his head gently.

"I always hearn tell," he spoke softly to himself, "that the only difference a-tween happy marriages and unhappy ones is that the happy ones keeps their bicker-in's private like—but I don't know, . . . I don't know . . ."

A moment more he looked at the prospector and his wife, then he turned away and his old eyes gazed out across the tinted ocean spaces to that something which had always seemed to beckon him from beyond the sunset glow. Lost in his dreaming the old man did not hear Shane's eager voice as he released the wheel a moment and pointed off the bow to where, beyond the rim of the sea, lay the northwest coast of Alaska.

"It's up there in the Valley of the Kuskokwim, El! They've made a brand new strike and are getting ten dollars to the pan!" He looked down at her and went on in his most coaxing Irish way. "Darlin', when we get Loll in school, and Jean and Gregg and Kayak safely settled on Kon Klayu . . ." he hesitated, then finished eagerly, "Sure El, it would do us the world of good to go up there, little fellow, . . . just to take a bit of a look. . . ." He straightened, his eyes alight with the old questing expression, his face turned to the northwest, his spirit already faring forth across sea and land to the beckoning Valley of the Kuskokwim.

THE END

The first of these is the fact that the United States is a young nation, and that its history is a history of growth and development. The second is the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these immigrants. The third is the fact that the United States is a nation of free men, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these free men. The fourth is the fact that the United States is a nation of law, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these laws. The fifth is the fact that the United States is a nation of peace, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these peace-loving people. The sixth is the fact that the United States is a nation of progress, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these progressive people. The seventh is the fact that the United States is a nation of justice, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these just people. The eighth is the fact that the United States is a nation of liberty, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these liberty-loving people. The ninth is the fact that the United States is a nation of equality, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these equal people. The tenth is the fact that the United States is a nation of unity, and that its history is a history of the struggle for the rights of these united people.

THE
END

ROCKING MOON



ROCKING MOON

CHAPTER I

THE great, hewed-log house, still known in the Alaskan village as the Governor's House, stood high on a green knoll overlooking the Harbor of Rezanoff. It cast a long morning shadow across the grass before its deep veranda—a shadow which ended just at the rim of the knoll where an old Russian cannon thrust itself out over the red roofs of the trading-post on the beach below.

The suns of a hundred and twenty-eight summers have sparkled on the island-dotted Harbor since Alexander Baranoff, the little Czar of the Pacific, placed that cannon there. It is the last of twenty that once guarded this far northern village of Rezanoff from the attacks of hostile Aleuts when the vast country now called Alaska was lettered on the charts of the old navigators as "Russian America."

The other nineteen cannon are gone, no one knows where. By the aid of "powder and shot and the help of God" the Aleuts are a tamed and vanishing race; and the Governor's House, whose walls once rang to the toasts and laughter of adventurous nobles from a Russian court, is the dwelling of Nicholas Nash, the

young bachelor owner of the Rezanoff Trading Company. Yet the Muscovian influence lingers and, though the flag-staff has felt the tug of the Stars and Stripes for fifty-five years, the peak of the roof's wide center gable is still surmounted by a large iron bust of Catherine the Great, that Empress of all the Russias, to whose enlightenment and liberality the exploration of Alaska was largely due.

Calm, imperturbable, she basks in the sunshine of Alaska's summers; rusts and reddens in the autumn fogs that drift down from Bering Sea, and braves the snows and blizzards of Alaska's winters, just as she did a century ago when Rezanoff was the greatest fur depot in the New World.

In the past her iron eyes have watched a thousand Aleuts line their bidarkas * along the beach below and kneel with heads bowed to the sand while priests in robes of scarlet and gold sprinkled them with holy water and a vested choir of native boys chanted a blessing on the hunt—a blessing which rose above the sobs of the assembled wives and mothers. Her iron ears have heard the brown women weeping because of the danger that lay out there in the storm-beaten kelp-beds, where the outlaw hunters of Baranoff guided the brown men to hunt the *morski bobrov*—the sea-otter—whose fur was the fur of emperors and nobles and precious enough to bring about the colonization of this savage land. She has heard the chimes of the old Greek Church on the hill herald the triumphant return of those Russian hunters in deep-laden galiots, convoyed by half a thousand bidarkas, all sailing in

* Bidarka—a decked-over canoe made of skins, with two or more man-holes in the top.

across the Harbor to unload a priceless cargo into the very log warehouses which form part of the trading-post today.

She has seen the Americans come, and the Russians depart, and the Aleuts die. There are those among the creoles—the half caste Russians—who say that the Iron Empress knows all that goes on below her, and that she still watches jealously to guard the interests of the few Muscovian families remaining in the village.

But there are others, like Colonel Jefferson Breeze, who consider the bust on the old gable but a menace to the safety of anyone who unwarily puts himself in line with its possible fall. The Colonel was standing now on the green before the Governor's House, his middle-height figure listing slightly as he leaned on a cane of mastodon ivory. He had not the slightest claim to the title of Colonel, never having been inside a barracks, but as he often explained, any man not a nonentity eventually acquires some kind of a title in Alaska.

"I tell you, Nicholas, my boy," he boomed in stentorian tones to the young man sprawling in a steamer-chair just outside the veranda, "that Rooshian Empress will tumble down offen that roof some day and kill—you—dead. Sure as God made little apples she will. Get your chair in under the porch." Colonel Jeff used his lower lip almost exclusively in talking, which habit gave him—even on the most serious occasions—the confidential look of one just about to tell a *risqué* story.

He finished his warning with a swift upward look at the Iron Catherine, wrinkles radiating from his kind, brown eyes, his bulbous nose shining between the two deep lines that marked off his humorous, well-formed

mouth. A grunt being the only response to his words, he resumed his former attitude of thoughtful contemplation, one booted foot crossed over the other.

An old khaki hunting-coat, fastened only by the bottom button, strained at the apex of a generous abdominal region. A traveler's cap with an enormous peak tilted jauntily on his gray hair with an effect that was somehow duck-like. But notwithstanding his girth, Colonel Jeff's face was clean-cut and his tanned skin the fine texture of a boy's.

He had turned his back on the unresponsive young trader in the steamer-chair and, with thumb and forefinger pinching his lower lip, had focused his eyes on the figure of another man lying unconscious on the grass before him.

"Nick," he said presently, "blamed if I like the way this chap here continues to stay knocked out. I wish the doctor would get through with Feodor—that no-account, pusillanimous scab on the tail of humanity—and get around to look this fellow over. He hasn't budged since we carried him up here from the dock." With lowered chin the Colonel peered down over his glasses at the object of his anxiety.

A tall young man with wide shoulders and lean, strong-looking limbs lay with his head pillowed on an air-cushion from a launch. Hair of intense black swept back from a pale, high forehead; and, whether from necessity or intent, Nature had for some time been allowed to take its course in the matter of beard. This, though dark and thick, failed to conceal a lump on the jaw. A smock of coarse, nondescript material was belted about the man's waist with an old suit-case strap. Faded blue overalls and boots of thin leather,

knee high and obviously of Russian make, completed a costume which clung to him damply.

"Oh, he'll come round all right, Colonel. You can't kill that breed." The occupant of the steamer-chair laughed carelessly. "I never saw such a tough-looking baby in my life. Looks like a Bolshevik to me."

The Colonel was silent for a moment. Very deliberately he tucked his cane under his arm, drew from his tight coat pocket a briar pipe, and inserted it in his mouth. He reached inside his coat, produced a fat, banded cigar, upended it in the bowl of the pipe and while applying a lighted match to the tip, drew violently on the pipe-stem, working his lips so energetically that the dewlap under his chin trembled. A volley of smoke announced a satisfactory draught.

"W-e-l-l, I admit he does bear the facial characteristics of a malamute pup, Nick." The Colonel turned again toward the veranda and spoke slowly, between puffs of the keenest enjoyment, projecting his words from under the pipe-stem by a sideways manipulation of his lower lip.

"But I'm telling you," he went on, "no Bolshevik would have jumped overboard to save that wretched, low-flung upstart of a Feodor. Of course, it's my own fault—my own fault entirely. When we left the Island of Rocking Moon this morning for those supplies for Sasha, I promised her I'd keep an eye on that devil half-breed, but Great Mahogany Ghost! How was I to know that I'd find the *Starr* in from the Westward, with my old tillicum, Spider Peach, captain of her? I tell you, Nick, my boy, we hadn't any more'n got the *Simmie* and *Ann* roped to the dock before that onery, ossified son-of-a-gun Feodor scrambled

aboard the Big Swede's schooner lying just off the stern of the *Starr*. Said he was going after a herring net the Swede had borrowed!" The Colonel took his pipe from his mouth and gave vent to a violent, one-syllable snort. "Herring net be blowed! He got a whiff of the Swede's *macoola* barrel, and ever since Father Anton went away, Feodor's been rarin' for a spree. I'll swear, Nick, I hadn't been talking to Spider more'n twenty minutes, when there comes the dummedest racket you ever heard. We rushed aft just in time to see the Swede with a capstan-bar and Feodor with a bottle. That devil was chasing the Swede round the deck of the schooner yelling to beat all git-out. Just as I shouted, the Swede threw the capstan-bar, landing it on Feodor. It knocked him plumb overboard and broke his arm—though we didn't know this till later. Nicholas, my boy, the bloody creole sank like a ton of ore, and this chap—" the Colonel pointed with his cane to the smocked figure on the grass, "—this chap, who was leaning over the stern of the *Starr* taking in the rumpus, goes overboard in as pretty a dive as I ever did see! He got hold of Feodor and started to tow him ashore—the tide running out like a mill-race, too. I don't know how in hell it happened, Nick, but just before he landed him, that crazy half-breed ups with the bottle he still held, and hits the fellow on the jaw. Yes, sir. Knocked seven bells outten him!"

Unheeded by the indignant Colonel, the small steamer *Starr* was moving slowly away from the dock below. Overhead seagulls called and answered. From across the village came the faint barking of a dog, and the nearer phonographic rendering of a "mammy" song popular in the States, 2000 miles southeast. But

Colonel Jeff was oblivious of these familiar sounds. He lifted his cap and with the little finger of the same hand perplexedly scratched his gray head.

"And by the lord, here we are in a pretty kettle of fish," he growled. "That scoundrel Feodor laid up with a broken arm just in the busiest season on the fox-ranch, no help to be found for love nor whiskey on account of the herring run, and *me* not knowing the fu-fu valve from the ash-pan on that blasted launch of Sasha's."

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it, Colonel Jeff." Nash lolled back in his chair and laughed again as if at the other's distress. "The Providence that looks out for drunken men and fools will provide. I got two extra men in from the West'ard today. Sasha knows I'm always glad to help her out—if she'll ask me. I—but cast an eye on your whiskered friend, Jeff. I think he's coming back to earth."

It was true. Even as the Colonel stepped toward him, the man on the grass stirred and opened his eyes. A moment later he was sitting up gingerly placing a slender, well-formed hand to his jaw.

"*Jee-ru-sa-lem!*" he mumbled in a distinctly American voice. "What a wallop!"

Pivoting his body at the waist, he looked about him as if in search of some one. "What became of that blamed fool?" he queried.

"He's all right, my boy! Feodor's all right!" assured the Colonel heartily, a deep relief in his voice. "How are *you*, sir? How are *you*? Permit me to assist you to your feet." The Colonel, when making an acquaintance, used his most polite phraseology.

"E-a-s-y . . . easy there, Chief!" The stranger,

still holding his jaw with one hand, waved the Colonel off with the other. "Not so fast . . . I feel as if I were fastened to the edge of a buzz-saw." He drew his knees up, and resting his elbows on them, sank his dark head in his hands. A battered wrist-watch, like those worn by officers during the war, caught the light as he moved.

Nicholas Nash sat up in his steamer-chair. His eyes, with their habitual look of somnolent disdain, passed deliberately over the stranger's smock and the foreign boots. For a moment it seemed as if he might speak of them. But he did not. He said instead:

"The *Starr* has pulled out without whistling, Colonel. Your friend here has missed his boat."

The newcomer raised his hairy face from his hands with a jerk.

"Good—*Lord!*" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER II

"GOOD LORD—*no!*" the man repeated, making an effort to get to his feet.

Colonel Jeff hastily thrust his pipe into his pocket, jabbed his cane into the earth, and stooped to lend his grunting assistance.

"Take it easy—easy, my boy. Just take it e-a-s-y," he entreated. "There!" He steadied the swaying figure with one hand, while with the other he carefully brushed some clinging grass from the stranger's damp clothing. "*Now*, what you need, my dear sir, is a wee drop of good liquor under your belt. Nothing like it to put a man on his feet. But—" he raised himself and laid hold of his cane again, "but—ar-r-umpp—" He hesitated, and cocked a meaning look over his glasses to meet Nash's eye. "All I can offer you is—a cup of hot coffee."

The Colonel brought out the last words with the martyred air of one who reluctantly observes the Eighteenth Amendment; for, until new arrivals proved themselves, no citizen of Rezanoff would admit that the village was anything but dry. "Yes, my boy," he went on apologetically, "I'm sorry to say that though we live in the grandest country on God's green foot-stool, spiritually speaking, honest-to-goodness liquor is as rare here as holy water in hell. But then," he added

with an airy wave of his cane, "there's nothing perfect in this world. The sun has its spots, the diamond its flaws, and the dog its fleas. Come, Nick! You're sitting there with as much animation as a sack of spuds. Take hold of this chap and we'll get him over to the hotel for a bit of lawful nourishment."

But the stranger did not seem in any further need of assistance. He filled his lungs with the tonic morning air, and, brushing the dark hair from his forehead, walked slowly over to the old cannon. He paused beside it, looking thoughtfully down on the dock below, where the *Starr* had so recently been moored.

"Well," he said at last, with an air of cheerful resignation, "she's gone, all right."

"She has, for a fact," came the Colonel's hearty agreement. "But never mind, my boy. There'll be another steamer along a month from now. And you'll find Alaska's not the worst place in the world to get stranded in," he continued, with a glance at the man's costume. "Looks to me as if you'd just got out of Siberia. They tell me that between the White Guards and the Bolsheviki over there, an American's a continual candidate for a front seat in Heaven."

As he ceased speaking both he and Nash looked expectant. When the man neither affirmed nor denied the statement, the Colonel went on:

"Oh, well, no matter where you're from, my boy, you've hit the right spot at last—the best country on God's green foot-stool, I repeat. By the way," Colonel Jeff leaned forward confidentially, "do you mind giving me a clue to the name you're using now?"

Something like a smile showed in the newcomer's gray eyes.

"Call me Tynan," he said. "Gary Tynan."

"And can you run a gas engine, Gary?"

"Absolutely!"

"Praise Heaven!" exclaimed the Colonel piously. "Now, I'm Jefferson Breeze, the best single-handed talker in the North, and the *only* sour-dough that knows nothing about a boat. And he—" with a wave of his hand toward the trader—"is Nicholas Nash—the High Mogul of Rezanoff."

Nash acknowledged the introduction carelessly. He shifted his long legs and rose from the chair, settling his cap forward over his light hair. There was a faint, indescribable look of danger about him as he thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers, and, with a shoulder-swinging gait, crossed over to the Colonel. He wore a suit of dark-green forestry cloth and leather puttees. His face was long and lean and of that ruddy hue that tells of freckles which fade after early boyhood. His eyes—it was difficult to tell whether Nick Nash's eyes were blue like those of his Irish father, or brown like those of his Russian mother, for though he was thirty years old, there was a vague, moist mistiness about them, such as is seen in the eyes of very young puppies, or in the eyes of natives who have drunk *macoola* many years.

People were divided in their opinion of Nicholas Nash. "Spawn of the Devil" some of them called him. Among those who used this term most frequently when young Nick was growing up, was his own father, Martin Nash, the owner and manager of the Rezanoff Trading Company. Motherless at the age of twelve, young Nick had been liberally supplied with money and kept in school in the States as much as possible.

His vacations spent at home were remembered with sighs by his father and the dusky creole mothers of the village. When he was twenty, he came back to Rezanoff and announced that he was through with institutions of learning. His greatest desire was to make money.

Still, he refused to work in the store, saying it was slow. He had brought back with him the fastest, best-equipped launch that ever cut the waters along the Aleutian Islands. In a land of reckless men he soon became notorious for his dare-devil exploits. Natives and white men alike talked of him from Prince William's Sound, with its hundred winding bays, to the end of the Aleutian chain stretching toward Asia across the shallow green of Bering Sea.

For half a dozen years the appearance of Nash's *Seal Pup* off any of the sleepy old Russian villages was a signal for the convivial ones to get out barrels of *macoola*, the viciously potent sourdough beer of the North. But—if it was summer—the dark village mothers gathered in their pretty creole daughters from outdoor tasks of berry-picking and hay-cutting on the hills, and put them to stirring bubbling pots of jam, or some other work that kept them in the copper-hung kitchens, where the maternal eye was never absent.

In those days honest old Martin Nash swore that when Death took him, his son should never inherit one cent. Rather would he leave the business of the trading-post to his friend, Father Anton, for the building and support of the orphanage the Russian priest was ever hoping to establish at Rezanoff.

But the war changed all that. Nick Nash's bitterest enemy could not, with truth, accuse him of lack of

courage. He was among the first to enlist in Alaska. After three years overseas with the 41st Engineers, he returned with a splendid record, and Martin Nash, for the first time, welcomed him home with tears of pride.

"He's a changed lad—a changed lad," he assured his cronies who gathered in the store of an evening. "He's that quiet—why, the fella actually comes to me, mind you, and takes the work of me bookkeeping off me hands—and me never astin' him at all!" he would invariably finish, looking about him with dim eyes alight with happiness.

The glamour of war dimmed, for a time, the memory of those other years. People wanted to like Nicholas Nash for his father's sake. "Nick? Oh, he was a bit wild," they'd say, "but the war took that all out of him. He'll settle down and make good, all right."

Old Martin had been dead a year now, and Nick was making good. He carried on the business of the Rezanoff Trading Company as well as his father had, though his helpers were all strangers to the village, men whom Nash had known in his restless days. He had even enlarged the scope of his territory. Since fox-farming was fast becoming the leading industry of the Aleutian Islands, he himself visited the various fur-farms to establish trading relations with the owners. He marketed nearly all the furs produced in that section, and fox-farmers as far east as Seward were beginning to depend on him for the best supplies, and often for hired help.

Nash made a specialty of fox-ranch supplies and his years of roving in the *Seal Pup* had given him a knowledge of the whole northwestern coast. As he stood

beside the Colonel now, his humid eyes missed no detail of the stranger's appearance, though his manner was casual.

Colonel Jeff proceeded, in his most orotund manner, to express his thanks and appreciation of the rescue of Feodor. "But you're feeling pretty skookum now, Gary, aren't you?" he finished. "Good! All right, then, I've got a little proposition to put up to you. Come along, boys, we'll toddle over to the hotel and see if Zoya can't give us a hot snack while I talk."

Without waiting for assent, he slipped a hand through the arm of each, and still talking, led them off down the flagged path, past a Russian sundial, to the roadway.

The only street tranquil old Rezanoff knows is the wide thoroughfare which leads up from the trading-post on the beach, and ambles its way through the village skirting half a mile of the crescent Harbor. Knoll-tops and hollows were dotted with small pink and white and yellow houses, all with window-boxes bright with flowers. Narrow silver paths made lines across the green downs and furnished sunny drowsing places for old dogs who slumbered on regardless of grazing cows and their tinkling bells. Clothes-lines on the tops of knolls waved banners in the morning breeze—faded reds, vivid blues and orange, a gay defiance to the flame of nasturtiums and the softer color of blue-bells, which painted the tiny yards fenced off with discarded herring-nets.

As the trio walked, they met pretty creole girls who smiled shyly while passing, with linked arms, toward the trading-post. Old, brown-faced women in trailing skirts and kerchiefs tied beneath their chins, plodded

stolidly along, now and again making a detour to avoid Aleut boys, half-buried under back-loads of wild hay. These jolly young harvesters came caroming along the road, laughing and exchanging quips with loquacious Colonel Jeff as they passed.

Sea-gulls, sailing on lazy wings, jeered down at some solemn ravens perched on the jade-colored roof of the old Russian Church. Quaint and Muscovian, the little house of God dominated the village from a semi-circle of alders. In the niches of the white belfry hung a chime of bells which had been cast in the foundries of Sitka when Baranoff ruled the North, and the Byzantine spire held aloft the glittering, three-barred cross of the Russians. But the shutters on the windows were closed, and three planks were fastened across the doorway. Behind the Church the old parish-house of squared logs was likewise shuttered and nailed up.

"Yes," trumpeted the Colonel, who had been pointing out these objects of interest with his cane, "yes, look at it—completely out of business. The war in Russia certainly played hob with the priests of the Greek-Russian Church, even here in Alaska. Since the disorganization over there, the poor devils don't get enough to bless themselves with, let alone keep up the work of the Church. Their followers here have never been trained, you know, to support it. The Czar attended to that—played the Little White Father stuff, and all that sort of thing. By the lord, I, for one, feel sorry for the priests. I do, for a fact!"

Nick's laugh, with its scornful undertone, interrupted the Colonel.

"Colonel Jeff, your heart's as soft as their hands!

Why shouldn't they get out and work like the rest of us, instead of psalm-singing all the time in front of a lot of Tin Peters?" Thus Nick disrespectfully designated the holy icons of his mother's Church.

"Well, they're doing it now, aren't they?" retorted the old man. "Yes, sir, every last one of 'em is at some kind of work—and they not knowing any more about manual labor than a baby, and everyone giving them the laugh, too, by the lord! They not only get out and hustle every day of the week, but in the evenings and on Sunday you'll find 'em attending to their Church doings—for not a darned cuss of 'em will give up his Church—no sir! Not one! And it costs real money to keep the candles burning and all that monkey business that makes religion pretty to the natives." Colonel Jeff turned aside to make room for an Aleut boy wheeling a huge barrow-load of salmon. "And there's the marrying and the burying and the sick that's everlastingly with us. Who goes good at the store, even now, for a native's grub, when he's got T.B. and can't work? Eh, Nick? Why, Father Anton of course, just as he always did. Though in the old days your dad was mighty good to the Aleuts himself, my boy," he added.

"Yes, and a pretty bit of money he lost by trusting the thieving beggars," commented the trader shortly.

"Well, the old days are gone," continued the Colonel, with the suspicion of a sigh. "When I was talking with Spider aboard the *Starr* this morning, he told me that Father Ivan, up at Karluk, cashed in the other day. The old fellow had a job as watchman on one of the fishtraps up there, Gary, and mighty dangerous work it is, too, climbing about on those high, spindling piles.

I know I couldn't do it, starve or no starve! Father held his job down fine last year, for all he was one of those gentle chaps who'd never been on anything higher than his own pulpit. But this year—well, I reckon he was pretty old for that kind of work, besides being crippled some with rheumatism. He fell off the trap last week and was drowned, poor devil. Luckily he was not a married priest, so he left no young ones behind.

"Now our Father Anton here at Rezanoff's a bit different. He's an up-and-coming little son-of-a-gun—I guess you thought so, Nick, ha! ha! ha! that time he nailed you stealing his sacramental wine when you was a kid, and beat the tar outten you!" The Colonel's hearty laugh rolled out as he hit the unresponsive Nash a mighty crack on the back. "Gosh! I'll never forget that day, Nick, ha! ha! ha! Nor how Sasha—but I'll have to tell you that story some other time, Gary. Here's the hotel."

The road took a turn and disclosed a long, hewed-log house built in the Russian style with a wide gable in the center. It looked like a comfortable frontier home, rather than a hostelry. The Colonel stepped carefully over a couple of dogs dreaming on the sun-warmed porch, and led the way into a large room which was lobby, lounge and dining-room combined.

Sunlight streamed through the many-paned windows, throwing upon the sand-scoured floor golden patches of light and the shadows of flowers that bloomed in pots on the deep sills. A wide couch ran along one side, its depressions and humps indicating long service. Three tables covered with white oil-cloth lined the other. On the wall above them was a large calendar

which performed its first duty of advertising a well-known rifle by means of a colored picture showing a man and a dog out hunting—both immaculately groomed. A small shelf near it contained half a dozen packages of assorted breakfast food, and some tins of condensed milk. The most striking object in the room was the icon which every Russian house knows. It occupied a shelf in the East corner—a beautifully hammered copper representation of the Saviour. Suspended by thin brass chains before it hung a *lampada*—a small brass holder for a half-burned but now unlighted candle.

"Ah-a-a! Here we are!" exclaimed the Colonel, hanging his cap and cane on the nail which held the calendar. He squeezed himself in at one of the tables, making room for Nick on the end. "Sit down, boys. . . . Anyone out there in the kitchen?" he called cheerily, looking over his glasses at the open door which led off from the room. "Oh, how are you, Zoya, my dear? You look pretty as a rice-lily this morning!"

In the doorway appeared a creole girl, tall, slender, round of limb. She leaned against the casing, looking in, smiling a crooked little smile that revealed a hint of white teeth. The crisp pink of her house-dress set off the clear olive of her skin and her cloud of dark hair parted in the middle and done in a simple knot at the back of her small head. Her eyes, dark and lustrous, were half-veiled by heavy lashes as her glance, passing swiftly over the Colonel and Gary lingered at last on Nick.

"Splice the coffee, Zoya, please, and bring us something piping hot—clam chowder would be about right," the Colonel went on as the girl approached. She stood

close to Nash, placing both hands on the table and leaning over as she waited for the order. "We have a new, though reluctant, addition to Rezanoff here. Mr. Gary Tynan. And you'll have to be mighty nice to him, Zoya, because it was he who pulled that obfuscated lummoX of a brother of yours out of the bay this morning, after the Big Swede knocked him out."

Zoya murmured her appreciation of Gary's act, and then with more spirit, went on to tell that the stricken and repentant Feodor was even then upstairs in bed with his arm in a cast, undergoing a lecture from their mother. The girl's voice was pleasant, but had the slight heaviness and deliberation characteristic of the half-breed.

"Of course, my dear," announced the Colonel, "this accident cuts off your visit with your mother, you know. I came over to tell you that you'll have to go back to Rocking Moon with me this afternoon. With Feodor laid up, Sasha will need you more than ever."

Involuntarily the girl's eyes sought Nicholas Nash's face and she stood back from the table. "I—I—yes. I'll be ready to go this afternoon," she agreed quietly. "And I'll hurry the chowder, Colonel Jeff." As she moved toward the kitchen the eyes of all three men followed her graceful figure.

"Never mind bringing me anything, Zoya," Nash called after her. To the others he added, "I had a late breakfast."

After a few minutes of desultory talk, he rose nonchalantly from the table and sauntered into the kitchen, where all sounds of culinary activity ceased.

"Nick's got a natural bent for the ladies." The Colonel shook his head slowly as he brought his pipe

from his pocket again. "And where most of them are concerned he's got a code of morals like a rubber band. With Zoya, though, you understand, it's different, she being raised almost like a daughter in the house of Father Anton. Nick has his good points, and the war cured him of a lot of his deviltry, but, by the lord, the fellow still goes in for too much of his goo-goo work." The old man blew experimentally through the stem of his pipe.

"I tell him—and I'm telling you now, Gary, that it absolutely ain't right to monkey round with native women. It ain't fair to 'em, in the first place and no—well, they just don't seem to understand our ways. There's two things a *white* man in Alaska has no business with whatsoever. One's an Outside dog, and the other's an Inside woman. A dog from the States ain't worth his salt on a sled, and a native woman—" He paused to light the remainder of the cigar in the bowl of his pipe. "Well, to come to the point, young fellow, being as you're a cheechako, I'll just tell you about Pete Scidmore—Skysail Pete they called him down Seward way where he worked for me on a little prospect I had there once. You see, Skysail married an Indian woman there—a pretty little baggage she was, too—and then he goes away on a stampede and being sort of absent-minded like, he stays for four years. When he comes home, my boy, he finds a wireless station has been put up at Seward. Also that his wife has three little red-headed kids. Skysail ponders, looking at the kids and then at his wife. Then he says, dubious like: 'W-e-l-l, Annie, it's getting things down to a pretty fine point when you can have 'em by wireless!' " Colonel Jeff shot a fountain of smoke into

the air and slanted an eye kitchenward. "Chowder!" he bellowed. "Chowder!"

A moment later Zoya, flushed and glowing-eyed, appeared with a tray from which two bowls and a coffee pot sent up appetizing wreaths of steam. She deposited her burden and left the room again.

Colonel Jeff laid aside his pipe and addressed himself to his chowder, but allowed its consumption in no way to interfere with his monologue. "Now, when Father Anton is here—God bless him," he added heartily, "he keeps his whole blamed flock stampeding on the trail of virtue. No *macoola*, no philandering, but plenty parties, and marriage bells and dancing every week where he can drop in and see the Devil ain't hornin' in anywhere. I say he knows his business, even though I was raised a good Methodist, with my father a minister and seven kids, and the wolf always at the door. But Father Anton's been away a month now, and well—you saw Feodor today. That brings me to the point, Gary—" the Colonel stopped eating and emphasized his next remarks with baton-like motions of his spoon. "I'm in a hellauva mess. I'm representing Father Anton—oh, not in the Church!" he explained hastily, seeing the other's surprised look. "Only in a business, and you may say, a domestic way. I've got to get a man to run that blasted launch of Sasha's and help us out on the fox-ranch at Rocking Moon until Feodor is O. K. again. Just got to do it, man! Now, see here—" he leaned confidentially across the table, "—you can't possibly get away from here for a month, so what's the matter with your taking the job, eh?" He stabbed at his companion's chest with the spoon.

"I'm your man, Colonel," accepted Gary Tynan, with a promptness that suggested empty pockets. "Anyway, until a steamer comes along. But . . . Sasha, and Rocking Moon . . . Sounds interesting, only it's like so much Hindoo to me."

"Well, well, you surely must have come from the North Pole if you never heard about Sasha." The Colonel scraped the bottom of his bowl to get the last morsel, and then waved the dish back and forth, looking in the direction of the kitchen. "Chowder! A little more service here, Zoya, my dear!" he called. "Two more chowders!"

When these had been supplied, he leaned across to Gary again and continued, with the air of one imparting information of vast importance: "Sasha, my dear sir, is the girl who upset the traditions of the orthodox Greek-Russian Church. Sasha is Father Anton Lariannoff's only offspring, and the owner and manager of the fox-ranch on Rocking Moon."

He allowed this statement to sink in before he went on: "Yes, sir, when the war came, and no more money came trickling in from Russia to keep things going here in the Church line, that little girl—I've known her ever since she was knee-high to a grasshopper—that little girl sat right down to talk things over with her dad. Her mother's dead, you know. And, by the lord, in spite of all the arguments Father Anton could advance against it, and there were a-plenty, two years ago she ups and makes arrangements to start a fox-ranch on the Island of Rocking Moon, about fifteen miles from here. Last year, of course, she didn't have any stock to sell, as she started in with just a few pairs, but this fall she stands to clear up a bunch of

money and set her dad on his feet again, even to beginning that orphanage the old man's so crazy to build."

"But why, Colonel, is Father Anton himself so mysteriously absent at this time, and his church nailed up?" asked the young man. "If the Island is only fifteen miles away, I should think he could attend to the work of each place."

"That's just what I say," exclaimed Colonel Jeff. "He could, but Sasha won't let him. You see he's one of these enthusiastic little cusses, always trying to advance the cause of Alaska—he being Alaska born from the real old Russian stock, you know. Now, all his life he's been rooting round in Russian archives and books—English ones, too, for that matter, both in Alaska and San Francisco. And he's writing a history of this country from the year one. He thinks Alaska schools should have real Alaska histories and geographies for Alaska children, instead of using school books from the States that picture this whole country as a frozen waste inhabited by Eskimos and Polar bears. Sasha is just as crazy about the idea as he is, and when she found that three months' research work in the Territorial Library at Juneau would about finish the thing up, nothing would do her, but he must go down there before it came time for shipping foxes away this fall. When Father gets this history done, he thinks he'll get money enough from it so that Sasha can give up the ranch—but I'm not so sure about that. Between you and me I don't think she wants to give up the ranch. Anyway, that's how it is. Father is off down in Juneau now, and *we're* here, where we have no business being if we're going to get a load of salmon on this tide," he finished, looking at a black-faced

watch he drew from his shirt-pocket. "Shake a leg, my boy. Let's go!"

The two men shoved their chairs back from the table and rose, just as Nicholas Nash—his cap still on his head—sauntered in from the kitchen.

"Oh, I say, Nick," the Colonel hailed him. "You needn't bother about finding a man to substitute for Feodor. Everything's hunky-dory. Gary, here, is going to take the scoundrel's place."

Nick turned quickly toward Gary, a flicker of displeasure showing in his eyes.

"Know anything about foxes, Tynan?" he asked, with a hint of suspicion.

"Not a thing in the world," replied the stranger cheerfully, "except the story about the fox and the grapes."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Colonel. "My boy, if that old party, Esop, was writing that story now, it wouldn't get by. He'd have to make something else the matter with those grapes. In these days of Prohibition it makes 'em too darned suggestive. Um-umm! Sets me to slavering at the mouth just thinking of 'em!"

The trader ignored the interruption. "Well, Tynan," he invited casually, "drop in at the store any time you're in town, and let me know how you like your job as hired man." His long stride covered the distance to the open door where he stood looking down the road. "See you again, Tynan." He drew a package of cigarettes from his pocket. "So long, Jeff. Be careful you don't fall overboard." He lighted a cigarette and with an impatient movement of his foot, shifted one of the sleeping dogs aside as he crossed the porch.

Gary watched the tall figure disappear round a turn in the road.

"Sort of a queer, smoldering eye, our friend Nash has," he remarked as if to himself.

The answer on Colonel Jeff's lips was cut short by the entrance from the kitchen of Zoya. "Ah-a-a, here you are, my dear!" he said, drawing a worn wallet from his pocket to settle his bill. "We'll return for you in a couple of hours, so have your ditty-bag all ready. It'll be mighty good to have you back cooking for us at the ranch again, Zoya. Between Sasha and me both trying our hands at the job, my indigestion's about ruined." He turned to take his cane from the nail. "Come Gary. We'll stagger down to the store now and get you a few things, for of course the *Starr* went off with all your duds." He cast a speculative eye on the young man's beard. "An' I'll trim up that brush heap of yours with the scissors, too, while we're there," he added. "Otherwise, you ain't bad-looking."

Half an hour later, as the two men emerged from the door of the trading-post with their purchases under their arms, a low rakish, cabined launch shot out from the dock near by. It headed across the sparkling blue bay, throwing water high on each side of its prow. The loud, arrogant *put-put-put* of its unmuffled exhaust struck the green hillside back of Rezanoff like a tangible thing, the echo rebounding to smite the ears of the listeners. Before the two men had reached the dock where the *Simmie and Ann* lay, the intensity of the sound had diminished until it was but a hum on the air.

"That fellow can go some!" exclaimed Gary, with a man's admiration for speed.

Rocking Moon

"Yes. That's Nick in his *Seal Pup*. Swiftest thing this side of Seattle." The Colonel stood a moment looking out over the island-dotted bay where the launch was growing small in the distance. "He's going over to Rocking Moon to see Sasha, I reckon."

The old man's bemused eyes lingered on the disappearing craft. "Nick has always had everything he wanted in life, seems to me—except Sasha," he meditated as if he had forgotten the presence of his companion. "His father was one of my oldest friends . . . but—" He paused, then finished with sudden fierceness, "By *God*, I hope he never gets her!"

CHAPTER III

AS Colonel Jeff and his companion stood on the dock at Rezanoff watching the vanishing *Seal Pup*, Sasha Larianoff, fifteen miles away, lay in the grass just below the weathered planks of a watch-tower which crested the highest promontory on her Island of Rocking Moon. Beside her, Alexander Baranoff, her pet blue fox, sat on his haunches looking out over the sunny, silvered water of the straits.

The August sun blended the scents of earth, trampled grass and wild flowers about her. Through half-closed eyes she watched seagulls flying over, their breasts sleek and white, their heads turning alertly from side to side. Little wind gusts came blowing across the spruce groves back of her, spicing the air with a savor of forest and the freshness of the open sea. They brought her the drowsy murmur of surf from the outer beach of the Island, and rustled the purple panicles of wild hay that bowed daringly over the fringe of space beyond her feet.

After a morning of hard work it was good to lie against the warm, sweet earth. She stirred in lazy content and tilted her chin in a frank yawn as she stretched her lithe, young limbs luxuriously. Her out-flung arm came in contact with the meditative Alexander, nearly knocking him over. He recovered his

balance and withdrew to the shade of a tall lupine, from whence he eyed her with reproachful dignity.

Sasha sat up laughing. "Oh, Alexander! 'scuse me, you comical, human little thing!" Her voice, banteringly affectionate, had a low, faint huskiness that was singularly pleasing. "But really," she went on, shaking a finger at her offended pet, "*you* ought to be over on the other side of the Island helping your spouse take care of her puppies. . . . What's that you say? She's tired having you everlastingly under foot! . . . Oh-o-o! P-o-o-r Alexander! Nobody loves him at all? Come over to me, old honey, and I'll rub your funny head for you."

Her slim, outstretched hands invited him, but the fox blinked his yellow eyes, and running his tongue over thin, black lips, turned his head away as if in supreme disgust at the words she had put into his mouth. Then, suddenly changing his mind, he came toward her with deliberate, dainty steps, his great, plummy tail trailing through the grass. He settled himself with his muzzle on Sasha's lap, and closed his eyes as she began stroking his maltese-colored fur.

The sunlight heightened the clearness of the girl's creamy skin, the deep amber of her long-lashed eyes, and the undertone of gold in her dark, copper-colored hair. "Larianoff red" they called Sasha's hair over in Rezanoff where she had been born twenty-three years before. All the Larianoffs had it, from the time of the first young Anton Larianoff, a secular priest, who came from the land of the Tsar in the historic galiot *Simeon, the Friend of God, and Anna the Prophetess*, in the days when the naïve Russians leavened their fur-trading with piety.

It was Anton who rang the first church bell that called the savage Aleuts to worship in Russian America. It was he who established the first school for their children. Sasha bore the name of his Russian wife, and through her had inherited the Island of Rocking Moon. In the North everyone knows that the first-born son of a Larianoff becomes a priest, and the first-born daughter inherits the Island of Rocking Moon.

Ever since Sasha could remember she had heard stories of Anton, the Fighting Priest, and while she admired the zealous exploits of this sturdy, red-headed one who fought and loved and worked and died nearly a century and a half ago, she had always taken an unholy delight in the extremely pious and lengthy name that adorned his vessel. As a little girl, despite the shocked disapproval of old Seenia, her Aleut nurse, she had bestowed it on all her father's rowboats and bidarkas, joyously rolling the ponderous syllables on her irreverent young tongue. Today, the modern gas-boat that enabled her to carry on the business of her fox-ranch bore the historic appellation, shortened affectionately to *Simmie and Ann*.

It was time for the *Simmie and Ann* to be heading home now from Rezanoff, where Colonel Jeff had gone for supplies. The girl hoped he would bring Zoya back with him. Ever since she could remember, Zoya and Feodor had been more her friends and companions than her servants, for in her father's house no one was called servant.

Her father's house! A pang of homesickness stirred in her heart for the substantial, homely comfort of the old hewed-log parish house at Rezanoff; for the happy,

hospitable years she had known there before the World War. Then Zoya's mother, who now kept the Rezanoff hotel, had been her father's housekeeper, and they never knew how many were to sit down to the table. Always there had been three extra covers laid in preparation, and always there were present the regular visitors, pensioners and orphans living with them.

And her father! Never was he so happy as when, in those days of plenty, he played host at the head of his long, candle-lighted table. Sasha's eyes grew fond as she envisaged him—a slender, rather small figure in clerical black; genial, humorous, kindly, but eagerly argumentative. How dear he was with his thick, white hair always ruffled on top of his head, his sapphire-blue eyes flashing above the white of his close-cropped beard, as they did when he made a point in a discussion! And with what an air he leaned back in his chair afterward, lifting to his lips the long, slender holder of Alaskan jade in which he smoked his single, daily cigarette! Sasha marveled that his hands, so slim, so sentient on the keys of a piano or the strings of a violin, could handle a spear or a gun with equal skill, or paddle a bidarka safely through the gale-lashed breakers of the North Pacific, as he was often obliged to do when he visited his outlying parishes.

Sasha mused on, absent-mindedly stroking Alexander's fur. She recalled her father's delight in the happiness of his dance-loving flock at Rezanoff. Never had his birthday gone by without all of them turning out to serenade him—guitars slung from their shoulders, voices raised in the old Slavonian melodies he loved so well. She wondered if he would get back from the South in time for his birthday festival this

year. Mentally she computed the weeks, counting them over on her fingers. Six weeks, if he were fortunate in finding in the Juneau library what he wanted to complete his book.

She wished it were her father she was waiting for today, instead of good-hearted, blundering Colonel Jeff, who was doing his best to look out for her. But perhaps the Colonel would have letters from her father. Although no mail-boat had come from the South, there was always a chance that the *Starr*, coming from the West'ard, might bring a strayed mail-sack.

"No more rubs, now, Alexander," she said at last, as she lifted the animal from her lap. "We'll see if Colonel Jeff is coming home yet."

She rose, shaking the clinging grasses from her narrow green frock while she climbed the few feet to the watch-tower.

About her the wild hay stood shoulder high, shimmering and swaying in the wind. A single larkspur tapped with purple fingers the broken pane of the tower window, which commanded a view of the waters north, east and west. No craft could approach unseen from any of those directions.

Sasha never failed to thrill to the incipient romance of the half-ruined old Lookout house. It was suggestive of those first wild and unsuccessful days of fox-farming in Alaska over half a century ago, when a San Francisco company had leased Rocking Moon from her grandmother and begun an industry hitherto unknown. Then it had been necessary, when the furs were prime, to post guards in the tower and keep a constant watch for the approach of Aleut hunters in their *bidarkas*—natives who slipped over from the other

islands hovering like chicks along the mother-coast of the Alaskan mainland.

The natives had no sense of stealing when they took the foxes. Before that time the whole country had been theirs for hunting, and every wild animal their legitimate kill. By the time the pioneer fox-ranchers had taught them to distinguish between "mine and thine," the poaching had effectively put an end to the first attempt to establish a fur-farm on the Island of Rocking Moon.

Sasha felt thankful that in these days of civilization poaching was unknown. She could not afford to lose a single fox this winter, with everything she and her father had at stake—everything, that is except the Mask of Jade. . . . But the Mask of Jade—where was it? Where could old Seenia have hidden it so carefully that neither she nor anyone else could find it—not even at the time, two years ago, when so much depended upon it?

For a moment the intensive expression in Sasha's eyes deepened as she pondered this question that was with her daily. Then, as usual, she dismissed it unanswered; and, leaning back against the old tower wall, she shaded her eyes to look toward Rezanoff.

A line of water-birds winging low over the straits was the only sign of life. The kelp beds that were the wonder of the old time voyagers, lay like masses of brown, shimmering ribbons hopelessly entangled along the rocky beach of Windward Island across the channel. Windward was one of the many low islands that interposed heavy spruce forests between her and the hidden village of Rezanoff lying at the foot of far, hazy, velvet-textured hills. Rimming the distance be-

hind them lifted a line of shadowy, lilac-toned mountains, marked with traces of volcanic ash from the last eruption of Mt. Katmai. They were gentle, sloping pyramids bathed today in colors so lovely that the very clouds deserted the blue of the zenith to hover above their snow-tipped peaks. Sasha watched the slow-moving, sun-shot masses of vapor billow in faint shades of silver and primrose and coral, from plum-colored depths. Clouds gave her a feeling of tremendous spaces, utter freedom; a delicious sense of detachment from all earthbound things. A sort of radiance welled up within her as she looked.

"Hello, God!" she said softly.

Ever since she could remember she had said that when she looked on some beautiful manifestation of nature. She said it, despite old Seenia's years of predicting that such awful familiarity with the Diety would bring a curse on the house of Larianoff. Sasha smiled a little now, remembering her old Aleut nurse's habit of hastily crossing herself while she darted fearful glances about. Dear, funny old Seenia! Not even her long residence with two generations of Larianoff priests could keep her from wearing a devil-charm about her withered neck—on the same string that held a tiny Christian cross! And she still spoke respectfully to the Volcano Oo-koon!

But Seenia, filled with native superstition, was yet at heart a romanticist, a chronicler of the loves and high adventures of the Larianoffs. Sasha had sat at her feet many an evening listening to the story of the first Anton who successfully competed with dashing Russian officers for the hand of a governor's daughter. And there was that delectable tale of her

grandfather when he was studying for the priesthood at the old monastery at Sitka. The girl never tired of hearing how the ardent young lover interrupted his studies long enough to elope with the daughter of a dissenting sea captain. Those two had not merely outwitted the captain, but had confiscated the irate parent's schooner and sailed away in it to the nearest village to be married! Ah, thought Sasha, how wonderfully men and women loved in those days! How good to have lived in those romantic times! Nothing like that happened now. Still, sometimes, when she stood alone on Lookout Point in the evening, watching the radiance of the sunset, she caught herself waiting. . . . It seemed, because of the sheer, unspeakable beauty of the world, a lover must come to her out of the veiled amethystine mysteries of those western hills. . . .

Gradually, through her dreaming, she became aware that the quiet of the afternoon had been broken. Then, like a rude, arrogant voice echoing against the cliffs of Rocking Moon, came the loud, staccato *put-put-put* of a gas engine. Across the channel a launch swiftly rounded the point of Windward Island. She watched its approach.

"The *Seal Pup*, Alexander," she said to her pet. "We might have known that only Nicolai would arrive with such speed—and commotion, mightn't we?"

She made no effort to go down to the house. Let Seenia tell him where she was. She liked Nicolai best with a setting of mountains and the sea, anyway. Ever since his return from France she had felt a vague uneasiness when he came close to her indoors—Nicolai, whom she had known ever since she could remember.

She sat down amid the grasses, the patient little

Alexander taking his place at her side. She could hear the launch coming nearer. Its echoing *put-put-put* marked its progress along the cliffs below her and into the little bay as definitely as if she were watching it.

Now, she thought, Nick was tying the *Seal Pup* to the float before the ranch-house. Now he was striding impatiently up the strip of beach that led to the path through the rice grass. With the eyes of her mind she saw him pause before the wide veranda where old Seenia sat drowsing. Perhaps he had a package for her—music or candy. A question, and he was away again, tramping across the meadow with its patches of blooming fire-weed; skirting the lily-pond that reflected the edge of the forest; climbing the hillside at her back, ruthlessly stamping down the blue-bells and snatching off the heads of the Indian celery. That was Nicolai—ruthless, inexorable when he wanted anything, or when he was going anywhere—even to see her. Nicolai who had as many moods as a woman. What would he be today, she wondered—the charming, irresponsible Irishman, or the moody and savage Russian?

At her side Alexander moved uneasily, rose and turned his muzzle to the wind. A time or two he raised it high in an exploratory sniff, then abruptly trotted off into the grass, just as footsteps sounded behind her.

"Why, Sasha!" Nick's voice carried a distinct tone of resentment. "Didn't you see me coming down the strait?"

"Didn't I see him coming down the strait!" Sasha repeated banteringly. "Yes, Nicolai, I did. And what's more I heard you, too, not being stone deaf."

She looked up over her shoulder into his face, and met the sullen expression of his agate eyes with a laugh. "Just look at his offended Majesty!" she went on, playfully addressing the bowing larkspur. "I do believe he expected me to dash down the hill and catch his line as he came sweeping in to the float!" With her arms she pantomimed the arrival of the *Seal Pup*, and the casting of the line.

"Sasha!" The word was snapped out like a command. "There you go, always laughing at me—ridiculing me—keeping me away from you with your mockeries and your devilish—" An impatient movement of his clenched hand finished the sentence. "Every time I come near you, lately, you say something to set me off wrong! You never used to be this way, Sasha," he finished irritably.

The girl did not answer at once. A puff of wind set all the seed-pods on the lupines clicking like fairy castanets; set all the blue-bells ringing on their thread-like stems. But she banished her impulse to call Nick's attention to them. Nick's ears never had been attuned to fairy music. He always laughed at what he called her childish notions, just as he always failed to play up to her bantering. Perhaps it was because he had lived for a time in the States, that far-away country of civilization which she had never seen. Even her father, who had often been to San Francisco, told her people were different in the States.

"Nicolai," she said, presently, in the same tone she had used to pacify the offended Alexander an hour and a half before. "Nicolai, your serious ways crash down on my spirit like a boulder from the crater of Oo-koon! Surely, now, you know I was just trying

to have a little jest with you. . . . Come, Crosspatch. . . . Come sit beside me here where we can look toward Rezanoff and——”

“I’m tired looking at Rezanoff, Sasha!” Nick interrupted her with rudeness that was apparently unconscious. A peculiar, a smoldering look crept into his eyes, a look the girl knew portended one of his restless, “devil” moods. “I tell you I’m sick of the whole country! For Heaven’s sake, let’s turn our backs on Alaska and look toward the South—toward civilization—for once.” He thrust his hands out to assist her with an air that brooked no refusal.

She caught them and came lightly to her feet. “All right, old bear!” she agreed cheerfully.

A few moments later they were seated on the other side of the watch-tower, their backs to its weather-worn planks. Nick’s moody eyes traveled over the scene below them.

“God!” he exclaimed. “Look at it, Sasha! . . . I should think you’d go mad here.” He threw out his hand. “The loneliness—the cursed *peace* of it all!”

Sasha’s eyes followed his. Below them the hillside was a-stir with waving grasses, bee-haunted celery blooms, golden-rod and blue geraniums. Eastward the riot of color fell away to a small horseshoe bay ringed with clean, gray sand. In the shallows below she could see the bottom of flour-like volcanic ash glimmering through the green water. The *Seal-Pup* reflected its white, graceful length at the float. Back from the edge of the beach the red roof of the wide old ranch-house was rivaling the bright color of the fireweed which splashed the meadow; and a forest of tapering spruce trees, heavy with cones, marched down

to meet the wire meshes of the fox-corral back of the log barn.

To the Alaskan girl it was home—home beautiful in the way of the wilderness; comfortable, too, and far from lonely. Were there not the gulls always calling overhead, the magpies and the blackbirds rollicking in the spruce tops, and one or more of her pure-bred blue foxes tiptoeing along the sands—her furry beauties that had no equals on the coast of Alaska? But then, Nicolai never had approved of her running the fox-ranch. He believed that women should be dependent on men in every way.

"The South!" Nick was repeating. "Oh, Sasha, if you could see it once—that country down there!" His voice thrilled to memory and his hand swept out across the green forest below, across the whole Island of Rocking Moon to the far line of purple sea showing on the other side. "If you could see it! The great, rich cities, with their high buildings, and miles and miles of chimneys sending up smoke to the sky. The luxuries! The conveniences! . . . God! I've been away from it all a year this time, and I'm hungry for it again—the city at night with the lights, the music, the perfume. . . . And the women—wonderful, subtle women, Sasha, with tinted faces and smooth, soft shoulders showing through the half-veiling, gauzy things they wear. And there's the dancing, and the—but oh! what's the use of talking to you, Sasha," he broke off, as if he despaired of conveying to her his ideas. "*You* have never even seen an automobile!"

There was a touch of intolerance in his voice. He drew a package of cigarettes from his coat pocket and selecting one, tapped the end of it impatiently against

his hand. Sasha, listening, her arms clasped about her drawn-up knees, could feel no remoteness from that world she had never known. At Nick's last words, with their implication of pitying impatience, her heart suddenly flamed with a feeling of defensive loyalty for the land of her birth. Abruptly she shot her feet out in front of her and turned to look at him, frowning under the tangle of her wind-blown hair. Her dark amber eyes were bright with resentment and the pink in her cheeks deeper.

"Auto-mo-beel!" She rolled the word scornfully on her tongue, unconsciously adopting her father's pronunciation of it. "Why is it that I should know the auto-mo-beel?" She lifted her firm little chin indignantly. "You forget, Nicolai, that I have seen it all in the moving pictures! I have seen your cities of stone and brick, with no place to breathe in the narrow gray cañons of streets, and the unfortunate inhabitants swarming through them—hurrying, jostling, yes, *leaping* aside to avoid collision with those auto-mo-beels that are darting about, crazy, like bugs! Auto-mo-beel!" she made a deliciously rude face. "Pooph!" And with a quick, outward flirt of both hands she added to her expressed opinion.

Nick paused in the act of striking a match and snatched the unlighted cigarette from his lips.

"Yes, yes," he returned in surprising agreement. "*That's* just it, Sasha, for those down there who must work for little money—and walk. But for the rich—the ones who ride—Ah, Sasha, you have no idea of the power money brings! You have no idea of the world of pleasure it opens up! Money! Power!" He brought his fist down on his knee. "I've tasted it down

there in the States! I've spent my money like a millionaire—while it lasted. I've had the jackals of traffic and trade slinking at my heels, fawning on me, giving me of their best. But I knew, damn 'em, that I was a king *only as long as my money lasted*. And always before I went broke, I had sense enough to come back here, back to Alaska to make more. . . . But it's getting harder every year to get it. The natives are bringing in fewer furs; the government is tying everything up. God!" he burst out passionately. "I wish I had lived in the old sea-otter days, when there was no cursed law in the land!"

The girl plucked a long spike of lupine and tapped the purple flowers against the palm of her hand. She was used to Nick's outbursts. He was always in rebellion against something.

"Yes, Nicolai," she nodded. "I've no doubt but that you'd have been one of the wildest of the sea-otter hunters, herding your poor Aleuts like a slave-driver." Her eyes began to twinkle. "But I'm sure downright piracy would have suited you better, Nick. Captain Kidd, for instance, did a fine business outside the law, you know." She smiled now, her short-lived resentment giving place to some picture of her imagination. "Oh, yes, Nicolai! I can see you swashbuckling along the deck of the *Adventure* in high boots and a clanking cutlass—see, like this—" She thrust out her chest, brandished the lupine, and with indrawn chin and protruding lips sang in a deep, artificial voice:

My name was Captain Kidd, as I sailed, as I sailed!
"And so wickedly I did, as I sailed!"

She waited a moment to see if Nick would smile. But he did not look at her at all. He lighted his cigarette and threw the match away.

"Oh, very well, sir. We'll be serious if you insist. . . . Anyway, I'm glad we live in a law-abiding community, even if traveled young men like yourself won't admit we're civilized."

The trader turned to her. "But don't you see, Sasha, we're neither one thing nor the other here in Rezanoff. Law is all right down in the States—but there ought to be some place in the world where a man can go and be himself—be free. When I'm in the States I want every comfort and luxury money can buy, and I'm willing to abide by the restrictions. But when I'm in Alaska where I can get none of those things, I want no restrictions. That's what makes me so restless here now—" he jerked his cap off his head and shook the light hair from his brow— "I'm tied to the trading-post since Dad is gone—tied to it and making just a little more than an ordinary salary. If I were getting money enough I wouldn't mind it for a few months in the year. I could always go to the States and have my fling then. . . . But—But—" He hesitated. "You see, Sasha, my ideas have changed a lot since the war. I never felt the need of money until now—a lot of money I mean. And I've decided to make it—or throw up everything and head for Siberia, or some place where there's freedom. I've *got* to make money. I'm going to make a pile of it next year—every year. Enough to live where I please,—anyway, eight months in the year. And Sasha . . . Sasha . . ." His voice softened as he leaned toward her, his

enigmatic eyes seeking hers. "When I go—I want you with me."

The girl held up her hand quickly as if for silence, but he went on unheeding.

"Yes, I'm going to marry you and take you down to the States to see what the Outside is like. And I'm going to dress you better than any of them, Sasha, you little devil!" His gaze traveled appraisingly from the girl's curl-crowned head to her small feet. "You pretty little red-headed devil!" He laughed as if in sudden appreciation. "By George, there are none of them that can compare with you down there, Sasha—even as you are now. . . . Come, sweetheart! Come, *lubimaya!* Don't look at me like that— You know you like me, Sasha." He slid his hand out with the instinctive arrogance of one used to submission. It closed over hers in a grip that hurt her. "Let's——"

With a sudden spring the girl was on her feet facing him. But she matter-of-factly shook her green skirts to dislodge the clinging grass, and with her lips pursed, began gingerly to rub the red spot on her hand. Only recently Nick had begun this talk of marriage. It troubled her, but with a desire to preserve their old-time friendliness, she refused to take him seriously.

"Blessed Peter!" she exclaimed with mild impatience. "How many times must I tell you, Nick, that I will not be courted in that love-me-or-I'll-beat-you-to-death fashion? How often must I repeat that I am never going to marry you, foolish boy?"

A silence that was somehow ominous answered her. She raised her face, for her companion was standing now. He was looking down on her. The wind blew his hair back from his lean face. His mouth was

pressed into a straight, lipless line that hinted of cruelty, and his eyes were smoldering as she had sometimes seen the autumn sun smolder behind the fog banks. For the first time she tried to read his eyes—those indecipherable eyes that were neither blue nor brown. Fear of something unknown, transient but chilling, touched her.

"Look here, Sasha! You really mean that, do you?" His voice had taken on a rough intensity, and a muscle at the flange of his nose twitched spasmodically.

"Yes . . . Oh, don't take it that way, Nick!" she cried, her heart stirred with sudden sympathy. "I'm fond of you—just as I've always been—but not that way. . . . Don't be like this any more, Nicolai!" She started forward, her hands held out impulsively. "Please . . . P-l-e-a-s-e be just brotherly to me as you used to be before you went to France!" she pleaded, her faintly husky voice tremulous with the memory of those other happier years when she alone, of all Rezanoff, could make wild Nick Nash listen to reason.

But the trader's expression did not change. He neither moved nor spoke.

"Nicolai?" she said, coaxingly.

She took another step forward and stood looking up into his sullen face with the playful, friendly smile they both had known. "Nicolai. . . ." The *boy* Nick had always given in when she coaxed him thus—had always said, a little abashed, "Oh, well—All right, Sasha, if you want it so." But the *man*—

Without warning he snatched her against his coat. She heard his heart beating and felt his hot face roughly, eagerly seeking her own.

From startled amazement her mood changed swiftly

to the frantic, caged feeling of one imprisoned and, in some way, profaned by the imprisonment. She was filled with panic and a furious momentary strength. She kicked gamin-like, and struck out with her fists, wrenched herself sideways under his arm, and before he could renew his hold, had squirmed from beneath his elbow. With both hands she pushed him from her and darted away, putting the length of the tower-house between them. Then she faced him, a panting, disheveled little figure, her bright hair tumbling about her shoulders, the back of her hand pressed against her quivering mouth, hot tears threatening to overflow on her cheeks.

She tried to make herself realize that it was Nick who stood there—Nick who used to haul her to the trading-post on his sled to buy candy; Nick whom she had always regarded as an older brother. But the bulk of him swam in her tear-dimmed gaze, huge, unfamiliar, repellent.

With an emotion strangely compounded of sadness, indignation and farewell, she turned from him, and stifling a sob, ran blindly down the hill.

CHAPTER IV

INSTEAD of taking the meadow-path that led directly to the ranch-house, Sasha turned out toward the beach. Her chaotic emotions of a few moments back had, by their very intensity, left her bewildered and strangely void of feeling. She knew only that she could not bear to see Nicolai again that day. She wanted to get away from him as far as possible.

She brushed swiftly through the tall grass at the foot of the hill, making a detour to avoid a lone spruce tree that spread cone-laden branches over a circle of wild roses. As she sped by, she was aware that Alexander, the fox, had glided out from the thicket and was trotting like a dog at her heels. A few moments later her sandals touched the hard, clean beach, and instinctively the girl fell into the trail walk of the North—the swinging, rhythmic gait that covers the ground almost without conscious effort.

To her left she passed the float where the *Seal Pup* lay, while on her right the roofs of the ranch-houses made red peaks above tall grass bordering the high-tide line. The smell of the sea came up damp and keen from the mark of the receding tide. Long, slim shadows of the girl and the fox moved smoothly before her on the sand, pointing eastward toward Lampadny Point a mile away.

Her little home bay lay between Lampadny and

Lookout Points, but the former was the only Point on the Island which was not a boulder-covered beach backed by beetling crags of talus-walled cliffs. Here the timbered hills of Rocking Moon sloped gently down until the forest fringed out at the edge of sand dunes where single trees, few and far between, stood out in blue, tapering beauty. But the dunes, thick with rice-grass, lupine and wild peas, rolled on in green and lavender softness until they diminished in a long sand spit. This curved about the bay like a protecting arm.

Sasha, arrived at the Point, turned into the swaying, waist-high tangle, and made her way across it to the seaward side of the Island. The wind was in her face.

She loved that moment of exquisite freedom that came to her when she emerged at the edge of the beach-drift and looked away over the silvered purple of the North Pacific, where no land lay between her and the horizon. Today, despite the disturbing events of the afternoon, she sprang, as usual, to a drift-log and stood a moment with lifted chin and outspread arms while the light wind fluttered her garments about her. It was a playful summer wind that chased big, deliberate, purple rollers in from the open sea, until, unable longer to withstand the teasing, they broke in spraying emerald and silver on the beach of Rocking Moon.

Sasha always sought the sea when she was troubled. There was something in its immensity, its permanency, that soothed and comforted her as religion comforts some women. She felt its calming influence now as she stepped down off the log and turned toward her goal fifty feet to the left.

There, topping a sand dune, a log tomb held aloft its six-foot Greek cross against the summer sky. Above the shimmering rice-grass, the timbers of the flat roof showed ivory-white, marking the grave of Father Paul, a Russian missionary of the old days, who was beloved by the whole Aleut nation for his deeds of kindness and sacrifice. Nearly a century has passed since his body was laid away and the little log house built above his resting-place; yet the spot is still held sacred, and many a tale of averted shipwreck the brown fishermen of Rezanoff tell—fishermen who in time of sea-peril, look toward Lampadny Point and send up a prayer for safety, just as their fathers did.

Sasha climbed the low wall; and, with a movement of content, seated herself with her back against the upright of the cross. She felt a sense of protection beneath the widespreading arms. Above her, in the intersection facing the sea, was a box-like receptacle with a glass door. It held the lamp, which, in accordance with the old custom of her people, was always lighted on the name-day of Father Paul. Each year this anniversary was the occasion of a pilgrimage from Rezanoff to Lampadny Point, where a vesper service was held in loving memory of the old monk. Sasha's mind, seeking the comfort and assurance of some dear, familiar thing, went back to the first pilgrimages she could remember, in the days before launches and steamboats were common in the North. Rocking Moon had been a lonely shrine then, uninhabited.

She recalled her father on the morning of the holiday, happy, energetic, setting forth from Rezanoff at the head of a flotilla of rowboats and bidarkas, over the fifteen miles of sun-jeweled sea that lay between

the village and Lampadny Point. She saw herself, very little, clasped in the circle of old Seenia's arm, sitting in the stern of her father's boat, on the vermillion chest that held his vestments. She heard the singing of the Aleuts as they paddled in a double row behind—the wild, chorded sweetness of native voices that floated out over the water, her father's tenor soaring above all in the chanting of the psalms.

*"Let the heavens rejoice,
And let the earth be glad;
Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof!*

*Let the field be joyful,
And all that is therein;
Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice!"*

In those days she thought this had been written about her country. It was Alaska in summer. The remembered harmony had power to stir her yet with its beauty—a beauty to which still clung the intangible, fairy-like magic of melodies heard in childhood.

Then, swiftly and unbidden, flashed another mental picture—that of a tall, light-haired boy who stood recklessly in the bow of the boat directly behind her father; a boy who stood with his thin, young chin lifted and sang, as her father often said, in the tones of an angel, while he plotted some deed of the devil. Nicolai's boyish voice had been at once the despair and the delight of the music-loving Father Anton.

Sasha shook her head to dismiss the picture. She did not want to think of Nicolai. She rested her bronzed curls against the log cross and allowed her

fancy to dwell on the landing of the flotilla on the other side of Lampadny Point, from which she had just come.

There had been the boats drawn up on the sand, the happy calling and running about, the camp-fires glowing under the trees. Almost she could smell the pungent beach-wood smoke that drifted blue in the spruce branches, as the picnicking pilgrims prepared their afternoon meal. Some of them brought samovars and served tea, as at home. Nick's Russian mother had been one of those. Zoya's mother, then housekeeper for Father Anton, did so, too, while Sasha and the other children played below in the sand.

The old monk's name-day came in the summer season of the long, light nights. After the picnic dinner, the peace of the early evening enfolded sea and land with amethyst mists, and dusts of malachite and rose. It was then that Seenia slipped away to light the *lampada* on the cross of Father Paul. Afterward, the little girl Sasha had always taken her place with delight in that long procession of pilgrims that formed on the beach of Rocking Moon. Even now Sasha's heart thrilled faintly remembering her father, splendid in his vestments of scarlet and gold, attended by his acolytes holding aloft the silver banners and the gilded cross. The grass lay crushed and sweet where he led his people across the Point to gather about the tomb for vespers.

The cool air of those bygone evenings had been pungent with incense from the swinging censers, piquant with the tang of the tide. The plaint of low-flying sea-birds keened through the chanting of the choir. The gold on her father's robes turned crimson

in the glow of the sunset as he stood below the cross holding out his hands in benediction above the kneeling figures on the sand.

Something in this outdoor ceremony, with its mingling of orthodox pomp and Arcadian simplicity, appealed strongly to Sasha. God seemed very near then, very simple, very beautiful. Not the God who was worshipped in her father's gilded church at Rezanoff, but her own God of the sea and the land and the sweeping winds. Sometimes she wondered if she were not a bit like old Seenia with her cross and her devil-charm and her respect for Oo-koon.

At the thought she looked up toward the East where the purple, tapering volcano of Oo-koon rose from its island foundation. Thirty miles across the water it reared its dim cone five thousand feet above the swells which sucked in and out the caves, honeycombing its base. A steamy jet of vapor curled lazily from its summit, as Sasha had seen it on clear days ever since she could remember. But Seenia, who was ninety years old, could tell of a time when the slumbering Oo-koon awoke and its crater vomited columns of flame and clouds of ashes. The melting snow on its sides descended in terrific torrents, sweeping away the native village at its feet. Seenia could tell of a time even before that, when the great Cave of Oo-koon was the scene of barbaric ceremonies, and Aleut maidens, in masks to their shoulders, danced naked beneath the swinging mummies suspended from the vault of the cavern. Those mysteries had all been banished by the priests, the masks burned and broken. That is, all except the precious, eyeless Mask of Jade.

The Mask of Jade! As the moments went by,

Sasha's thoughts became busy with the mystery of its disappearance. But she was no nearer to solving it when Alexander thrust his weird little face out from the rice-grass below, and sprang to the top of the tomb.

When she turned to make room for him beside her, her attention was drawn to some marks which dotted the upright of the cross just under the *lampada*. They were three nearly obliterated depressions with splintered edges—bullet holes. She recalled well the day they had been made by the boy Nicolai, who had used the cross as a target one evening to try a new gun, just before the pilgrims embarked for home. It was for this reason she had never told him her great secret about the tomb—the secret Seenia had confided to her childish ears; the secret of the hinged log that swung in and afforded an opening to the tomb. Nicolai! Everything seemed to lead back to him today. She pressed her fingers in the depressions and slowly shook her head. Nicolai held nothing sacred. She knew it now; not even their friendship of a lifetime.

It came over her with a pang of sadness, a sense of loss, that today ended that laughing, teasing comradeship which had always existed between her and Nick Nash. She did not know why, but she felt the same emotion she had experienced when she—a wide-eyed little girl—had watched him use the old monk's cross for a target.

This was a negative sensation, however, compared with the sudden tyranny of feeling that seized her when Nicolai's face flashed before her—the face of the new and repellent Nick who had snatched her to him that afternoon on the Lookout. And he called that love!

She did not want love from him. She wanted him always as she had known him before he went to France.

Sasha dreamed of love as something powerful, yet delicate; something strong yet tender. She expected it to come to her some day, romantically and beautifully as it had to all her people. But if love brought that look to men's faces— She shivered again at the recollection, and threw an impulsive arm about Alexander's soft neck, hiding her forehead against his fur.

Then, with a queer, disturbing touch, there came for the first time a realization of her obligation to Nicholas Nash, the trader. It was the Nash money that had paid for Alexander, for the *Simmie and Ann*, for the very dress upon her back, for the food she had eaten for a year. True, it was old Martin Nash who had advanced nearly all the money with which Sasha began her fox-ranching. It was Nicolai's father, who, protesting vigorously in his Irish brogue, had finally taken as security a mortgage on Rocking Moon and everything the Larianoffs owned. Gladly would the old man have made the loan without security, but the Larianoff pride had insisted otherwise. The combined possessions of Sasha and her father seemed little enough to offer as security in a country where a man may have as much land as he needs for the staking. But Martin Nash—her father's best friend—was dead, and it was to Nicolai they owed the money now. Before this she had felt no uneasiness about it, no weight of obligation. Now, because of Nicolai's behavior that afternoon, she longed intensely to free herself from the debt at once. Yet this was not possible. She must wait until December when she sold

her foxes. There was no need to worry about paying the full amount then, for success had attended her efforts, and Rocking Moon vixens were already noted for producing the largest litters of pups on the coast. Rocking Moon Blues were in demand.

Disturbing this mood of self-confidence came memories of the failures of other fur farms in the vicinity. A fluttering feeling of impotence seized her for a moment as she considered her own possible failure. Then she hugged the passive Alexander tightly against her and spoke aloud to reassure herself.

"No, no, Alexander. That never can happen to us!" Swiftly she computed: there would be sixty foxes ready for shipment in December—thirty pairs of the finest Blues on the coast of Alaska. And she would get \$350 a pair for them. "So you see we can't fail. . . ." Alex nuzzled his cold little nose against her neck. "We *can't* fail, honey."

Nevertheless, the thought of disease, accident, crept insidiously into her mind, drawing in its wake a train of appalling possibilities. She, a priest's daughter, had upset all precedent by engaging in business where no woman did such things. Against her father's advice, and the advice of all her friends, she had staked everything they owned on this fox venture—after she discovered that the Mask of Jade was gone.

The Mask! She looked out across the water to Oo-koon, milky-rose now in the late afternoon sun. It was over there in the great Cave beneath that tapering cone that her ancestor, the first Anton, had come into possession of the eyeless Mask of Jade, that famous relic of a heathen time which had come down through generations of Larianoffs; that last weird

symbol of barbarism which collectors from the largest museums in the world had tried in vain to buy from her father during those comfortable days before the war. Later—how well she remembered—when he would have parted with it for enough to finance for her the Rocking Moon Ranch—it was gone.

Seenia, for sixty-five years its guardian, could not tell whether it had been stolen or whether she herself had hidden it in some new place and forgotten. Seenia had lapses of memory now—the mark of her great age. Sasha knew the old Aleut was living on only in the hope that some day she might remember. Sasha encouraged her to talk of it each day, hoping, too, that the subconscious might give up its secret.

Four years ago a collector from a New York museum, more eager than the rest, had left in the bank at Seward a deposit of \$8,000, together with a photograph and a detailed description of the relic. The money was to be delivered only to Father Anton or to Sasha any time within five years, if they brought the Mask of Jade. The time limit expired in December, little over four months distant. But Sasha was not troubled about this, for she had long ceased depending on the Mask of Jade to revive the family fortunes.

Busy with her thoughts though she was, the girl had not forgotten to listen for the sound of Nicolai's departing launch. She had not heard it, but the outgoing tide gave evidence that she must have been at the tomb an hour. Off the beach below her, boulders were thrusting their weed-crowned heads through the breakers, and already three sinuously stepping foxes explored for sea-food in the windrows of grasses left on the sand by the tide.

The girl watched their approach. Familiarity had never dimmed that feeling of awe and delight with which she regarded them. Even in the sunlight their maltese-colored fur made them shadowy, graceful wraiths of the wild. Now they stopped to raise pointed muzzles, sniffing the air for possible danger. Now they poked their noses among the bits of seaweed; now, as if in time to some inaudible rhythm, they trotted swiftly along the sand, their heavy tails carried low and to one side.

When Sasha saw them moving thus she knew why a certain dance-step which Nicolai had taught her, was called a fox-trot down there in the big United States she had never seen. Nicolai knew all the dances of civilization, just as he knew those of the North. Often, when in one of his boyish "devil" moods, he had danced for her and Zoya, to the music of rattles made of the crimson, clattering beaks of sea-parrots; danced the Whaler's Incantation and the Shaman's Dance. When he stepped those heathen figures there was about him a superlative savagery at once dangerous and alluring. She liked him then better than at any other time. She, a daughter of a long line of priests, found some buried instinct within herself rising and responding. She had even composed and played for him on the piano a muted, booming bass accompaniment to the castanets.

But as the years went by, Nicolai ceased to dance the old Aleut figures, at least where she could see him. She knew, however, that on his *macoola* parties to the Westward he did. When with her, he wanted to dance only those steps he brought back from the States—the dances of civilization. For years now he had ex-

pressed a contempt for all things Alaskan. He was fond of telling Sasha that she was "provincial." While she admitted there was a certain fascination in the matter-of-fact way in which Nick mentioned the customs of New York, San Francisco, and, after the war, Paris and London, she fiercely resented his attitude toward the land of his birth. It cheapened him in her eyes. Sometimes she thought she might have cared for Nicolai as he wished her to, if he had remained loyal to his own country.

She raised her head now as her ears caught the sound of the *Seal Pup's* exhaust assaulting the cliffs below the Lookout. Nicolai had waited long for her to come back, she thought. She gave Alexander's head a pat and came to her feet.

Her eyes were even with the glassed-in box which held the lamp of Father Paul. A small blackened wick lay dry on the bottom of a deep bowl of heavy opaque glass. The oil had burned away, for it had been over a month since the last vespers at the tomb. Zoya now performed the ceremony of lighting the lamp at vespers, for Seenia had given up this duty nearly five years ago.

Sasha opened the little glass door and turned the bowl upside down to keep out the drifting sand. Sometimes fishermen, grateful for a big haul, landed to refill the bowl with oil and set it burning.

The girl stood a moment longer looking out across the sea. Though the sun was still high there was in the air that indefinable freshness that tells of evening coming on. Between her and the ethereal wedge of Oo-koon a flock of sand-pipers curved and swerved with thin, eerie cries. The blue of the zenith melted

into opal and pale amber out on the horizon, and the wind was dying away on the receding tide.

"Come on, Alexander. We're going home, little man," she said, stepping to the edge of the tomb. She jumped lightly to the sand and the fox leaped after her. Her thoughts were still busy with the events of the afternoon as she retraced her steps across the Point toward the ranch-house.

On the other side the little home bay lay smooth as a mirror. Ravens and magpies played in the rock weed left bare by the tide, and half a dozen foxes scampered along the edge of the drift, already anticipating feeding time. Just as she was nearing the float her own launch, the *Simmie and Ann*, rounded into view from the west.

Sasha quickened her pace and ran out on the float to wait for it. She could see Colonel Jeff and Zoya seated placidly, as usual, on boxes of supplies on the stern deck. Knowing how helpless the Colonel was in matters pertaining to the launch, she made ready to catch the line when Feodor should dart from the wheel and throw it to her.

But could that be Feodor she saw dimly in the shadow of the pilot-house? She tensed the muscles about her eyes as she looked again. No, decidedly it was not. A strange man, with a short, dark beard, was steering the *Simmie and Ann* in to the float. Feodor was nowhere in sight.

Interest gave place to anxiety. She remembered she had not asked Nicolai about the Colonel and Feodor. What could have happened in Rezanoff? She checked her conjectures with the thought that the creole was no doubt below at the engine, and the Colonel had

brought back one of the friends who were ever dropping in on him from remote corners of Alaska.

The launch was close in now and slowing down. The new helmsman was making a good landing. She hoped Colonel Breeze would not try to toss her the line and fall overboard as he had done on several former occasions. She called out a cheery greeting to him and Zoya, and then motioned to the man at the wheel. He gave it a turn, working the wheel-house control of the engine, and ran nimbly to the bow to throw her the rope. She caught it and snubbed the craft to the float.

"Where's Feodor, Colonel?" she inquired, when the half-breed failed to appear.

"Feodor is *hors de combat* for the present," announced Colonel Jeff, pronouncing the foreign phrase exactly as spelled. "But I rustled you some one else in his place, Sasha. Mr. Tynan, here, is a first-class engineer." With a bow and a gesture the Colonel managed an introduction, and then proceeded to explain to the anxious Sasha the stranger's rescue of Feodor, and the latter's plight.

Sasha, though listening to the old fellow's long-winded discourse, was able also to observe the new man, for Tynan did not wait to be told what to do. He was already unloading the supplies.

She was somewhat surprised at his appearance. No one dressed like that in Alaska. The smock, the high, foreign boots, the beard all gave him the look of a brigand. Yet he was not unattractive. She liked his height, and the way his shoulder muscles rippled under the thin smock. She liked the way the old suit-case strap fell low on his narrow hips. His eyes were

very deep and gray beneath the blackness of his hair, and his teeth very white in the tan of his face when he smiled, as he did while helping Zoya, the half-breed, from the launch to the float. All during the Colonel's recital this undercurrent of observation went on in her mind. When the old man finished, something she called her "malamute instinct" had approved of and accepted the stranger.

She stepped aboard the craft and looked down into the concrete-lined pit that was brimming with fresh salmon, whose silver scales caught the light in an iridescent gleam.

"Oh, Colonel, you *did* bring the fox-feed!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid your troubles had made you forget. Zoya, run along, please, and get us an early supper. Afterwards, I shall go with Mr. Tynan on the launch and show him the feeding-stations about the Island. Did you get any mail, Colonel Jeff? Any word from Dad?"

"That I did, Sasha. The *Starr* had a small sack of mail that had been carried by to the West'ard. Here you are, my dear." He held out to her a couple of letters bound together by a rubber band.

Sasha sprang to the float and took them. After a word concerning the storing of the supplies, she tucked the letters in her pocket and followed Zoya to the house.

The wide veranda, with its uprights of spruce logs, was deserted. Seenia had sought her warm corner in the living-room and her porch chair was empty. Beside it, just under the old ship's bell used to call the men to dinner, stood a rough table. It held a copper dish overflowing with blue wind-flowers, and a pack-

age. The package had not been there when Sasha left the house.

She walked over to see what it might be, though she was sure it was one of the large boxes of candy Nicolai sent to San Francisco to get for her,—the kind, so he had told her often, lovers give to their sweet-hearts in the States. Slipped beneath the string was a folded paper, a sheet hastily torn from a note book. He must have put the note there after she left him on the Lookout.

She drew it out slowly and with conflicting emotions read it. Nicolai had written in Russian, the language of his mother :

"Sasha, forgive me. I am very unhappy."

CHAPTER V

GARY TYNAN watched Sasha leave the float and run up the sloping beach toward the ranch-house. Though he had not consciously given any thought to the girl Colonel Jeff had mentioned as his employer, he had been vaguely prepared for a tall, Amazonian type of woman, dressed in khaki trousers, perhaps, which too snugly defined ponderous hips. It surprised him that this daughter of Alaska, this owner of Rocking Moon, should be so young, and so small and slender. The tumbled, copper-shadowed hair that crowned her head, reached hardly to his shoulder as she stood beside him. When she looked up at him he became suddenly and acutely conscious of his unshaved face and the old smock that had dried on him in wrinkles which made it look even more disreputable than it was. What a bearded barbarian he must seem to her! He stood looking after her, one hand tentatively feeling his jaw. Thank heaven the lump had subsided, anyway!

As he shouldered a gunny-sack of fox-meal he promised himself that he'd borrow the Colonel's razor at the first opportunity, and use it.

"Where to, now, Chief?" He turned to his companion.

Colonel Jeff was engaged in getting a can of beef scraps to his shoulder. "To the barn, my boy. To

the barn," he replied with unintentional metrical effect, as he led the way off the float to the beach. "We'll pack all the fox-food up there, and then take the grub to the house."

Gary followed him along the trail that led through a stretch of rice-grass until it turned abruptly at right angles into a small grove of alders lying between the house and the barn. Lettuce-green ferns spread delicate fronds under the trees and clustered about a circle of gravel, which formed the base of a primitive shower just off the path. He stopped a moment to look at it. Thrust up from the center of the clean white stones was a seven-foot pipe with a curve at the top. Beneath the curve hung a perforated iron kettle such as the early trading companies used to supply their sea-otter hunters for trying out seal oil. The water, not entirely turned off, fell musically into the kettle and dripped on the gravel below.

As Gary walked on he became aware of a silvery tinkle so faint at first he thought he must have been mistaken. But it stirred again; and again it was repeated, thin, illusive, lovely.

"Do I hear bells, Colonel, or don't I?" he asked finally.

"You do, my boy. They're the tree-bells Sasha has strung about here in the alders. See . . . there's one of 'em on that branch yonder. No bigger than a robin's egg. One of the Larianoffs was a captain in the fleet of commerce that took cargoes of Alaskan furs and ivory to China and came back with tea in the old days of the Russian occupation. He brought those little silver bells back from Korea once for his sweetheart—oh, I reckon it must have been all of seventy-five years

ago. Kind of a pretty notion, eh? Tree-bells? Sasha says they bring good fortune and happiness."

Gary caught a silver gleam among the green of the leaves. Tree-bells from Korea! Tree-bells from some exotic garden of the Orient swaying in the wild alders beside the cabin of an Alaskan girl! How alien, he thought, yet how subtly enchanting was this cobweb thread of sound speaking of the far East here on the shores of a Northern sea. Not even a poet's imagination could have conceived such a thing. He felt as if he were playing a part in a quaint romance staged in some lovely, lonely spot the like of which a man might search the world over and never come upon again. . . . Suddenly there stirred in him an appreciation, a realization of the witchery and wonder of life—a feeling which he, in his state of post-war disillusionment, had thought forever lost to him. True, it was but a ghost of that intangible sense of expectant youth that had been his only a few years ago, but it was there—not dead; awakening, perhaps, from a long sleep.

He shifted the sack of meal on his shoulder and quickened his pace to catch up with the Colonel, who was just entering the wide door of the log barn. Under the low beams two great salmon-vats squatted, like fat old squaws. A brick stove, like an oven, had embedded in its top a three-foot iron kettle, clean inside as a platter and ready for the next cooking of fox-food. Gary deposited his burden beside the stove and went out again into the late sunshine.

The Colonel, after showing the newcomer the way, left him to attend to the fox supplies, while he, himself, took the household articles to the kitchen. Gary

was making his last trip when the young mistress of Rocking Moon came out on the veranda of the ranch-house and rang the ship's bell fastened to one of the log pillars. The melodic sound dwelt on the air with singular, intimate homeliness, like hearthstone music. He wondered if that bell, too, was a relic of the seafaring Larianoff who had brought the others from Korea.

"Supper-time—in ten minutes, Mr. Tynan!" called the girl, with a friendly wave of her hand.

Before the time was up he and the Colonel, whose good-natured face shone from his recent ablutions, were back on the verandah awaiting the summons. When it came, Gary, a little curious, followed his companion into the big, rectangular living-room which extended across the front of the house.

It was a room of very general purpose, containing the furnishings gathered through four generations of Larianoffs. To the wandering Gary it seemed a friendly room with that seductive charm that comes from coziness and homelikeness. The westering sun slanted through the small panes of the oblong windows, pointing a golden finger to the age-darkened portrait of a young man, almost barbaricly princelike in the robes of a Russian arch-priest—the first Anton Larianoff, Gary afterward came to know. Against the smooth, hewed-log walls, unstained except by time, corduroy hangings showed leaf-brown with glints of apricot linings. There was the apricot gleam of old native-copper bowls, dented and flower-filled; the sheen of the silver-and-gold icon and *lampada* in the East corner; the feathery green of hanging plants against the light; the blurred dimness of old rugs trod-

den into monotonous. Sturdy home-made chairs promised comfort in the cushioned depths between their arms. The fireplace, primitive in its roughness, was built of brown rock from the sea-beaten cliffs of Rocking Moon. The dying wood fire flickered on the brass of andirons older than civilization in Alaska.

Before the hearth, on the largest brown bear rug Gary had ever seen, squatted a low, wide couch of mahogany, a massive, foreign-looking piece of furniture piled with corduroy cushions, brown, orange, cobalt and olive. The table at its low back held books, the latest magazines and a friendly, parchment-shaded lamp, made evidently from the bowl of a samovar. Over the top of the yellow-keyed piano a kiskillim spread its age-fused colors, and a Russian balalaika lay across a cabinet phonograph. Near the windows facing the alder grove there was the glint of a copper samovar on a massive sideboard, and silver on the supper-table spread with cream-colored linen. With the effect of blending and harmonizing the whole three sides of the room below the deep-silled windows were lined with book-shelves well-stocked with Russian and English volumes.

As Gary looked about him, his ideas of Alaska and Alaskans, formed by reading grim tales of a crude and gloomy North, underwent a complete change. His eyes, with quickened interest, sought the young mistress of the establishment. On their entry she had been leaning over the back of a wide wing-chair which faced the windows framing the bay. She was talking, her bright head bent, to some one in the chair, invisible from where Gary stood.

"Oh, here you are!" She looked up at the two men

with her flashing smile. "We're hungry as bears. Come Seenia—" she held out her hand—"supper-time now. I'll be your escort to the table tonight."

From the depths of the chair a woman slowly rose—the woman with a background of ninety years. But there was none of the repellent emaciation of age about her. In her youth she must have been tall. She was taller now than Sasha, yet her figure, though not stooped, had a look as if the heavy hand of life had pressed it down a little each year. Her coarse, thick hair, white as bleached clam-shells, was parted in the middle and drawn into a knot behind, and in the pale old-ivory of her face, her black eyes seemed to have retreated under the shelf of her brows until they were like shadows on a marble head. Hers was the primitive type of face that registers least the passage of years; yet, when she looked at Sasha and patted the girl's hand, her eyes were soft with that great maternal love which is a characteristic of all Aleut women.

Sasha's manner had in it some of the great indulgence of childhood as she tucked her arm under that of the old nurse, and guided her to the table. A few moments later they were all seated, the girl in her father's big chair at the head, the Colonel entrenched behind the soup tureen at the foot. Gary found that in this household mistress and servants sat down together. He was conscious of that indefinable atmosphere of Northern hospitality which makes the stranger feel at once as if he were a member of the family. Both Sasha and the Colonel talked to him of the plans of the morrow as if he had been with them for months instead of hours. He, who had been homeless for so many years, liked it.

"Now, my boy, tomorrow we make a start salting down salmon for the winter," announced Colonel Jeff, ladling out a bowl of steaming soup. "This is our harvest time, you know. Harvest time even though we're in what so many ignoramuses down in the States insist on terming 'the frozen North.'" He made a contemptuous movement with the ladle, then continued. "The girls here will be busy putting up jellies, and berries and clams, and we have the hay to get for the cow, and two vats to fill with salmon for the foxes. Besides, there's the salmon and herring that we must smoke for family use. I tell you, my boy, the old H.C.L. doesn't trouble us much up here. About all a fellow really needs to live on is a fish-pole, a clam-shovel and a gun, and once you get started garnering in your grub from Mammy Nature's supply, you lose all taste for the highfalutin' grub they feed you in the States." He sat back while Zoya removed the soup tureen. "Why, I can remember that 'gone' feeling I had last year when I went down to California to visit my sister in Burlingame," he continued, applying himself to his soup. "Between minding my manners at the table—on account of the lady flunky keeping tabs at my back—and the foreign food they had, I like to starved, by the infernal Jumbo! And I got such a hankering for smoked salmon, my boy, that I—well, I cut my visit short right after the wedding, and I just naturally burned up the wind getting back home here. Didn't I, Sasha? Yes, sir, one month was enough for me, down there. What I didn't learn about profiteering and bootlegging you could engrave on a poker chip. Of course, I never would have gone Outside but for that wedding—ah, Zoya," he broke off as the

girl placed before him a heaping platter of deliciously browned salmon steaks. He picked up the serving knife and resting an arm on each side of the platter, looked up at her with twinkling eyes. "My dear," he said in his best speaking voice, "could any eatable be more delectable than this piscine delicacy when prepared by your own fair hands!"

Zoya laughed as she put down the plates, and an oblique glance from her lustrous eyes rested a moment on Gary as if to see whether the cheechako appreciated the Colonel's playful, but to her, obscure comments on her cooking.

"Colonel Jeff, you forget how to speak United States!" She smiled banteringly. "You forget all about how to speak United States since you go to Cal-eef-ornia!"

"Tell us something about the wedding," reminded Gary, who was interested in the garrulous old Alaskan's point of view.

"Oh—*that!*" Colonel Jeff waved his knife carelessly. "It was my niece's wedding, and being my only one, I felt as if I ought to be there to give her a send-off. But—never again for me! I'm a simple man, and what with the temperature at a hundred, and me not allowed in my shirt-sleeves, and the rehearsing, and fluffy bridesmaids overrunning the house, and all the swank, I was nearly a total ruin before it was over. By the lord, I couldn't help but contrast it with the nice quiet wedding of Aggie and Jack McGillis, friends of mine in the Interior. I never told you that story, Sasha. It happened in the days when preachers were as scarce as soap in an igloo. I didn't attend the wedding, exactly, but one evening I was floating down the

Yukon in a dory, and I ran up a little slough to a small lake and made camp under a big birch tree. I noticed some scratchings on the bark, so after I got my grub warming up on the camp fire, I goes over to see what it was." The Colonel chuckled as he served himself salmon. "Say, you could'a knocked me down with a feather!" He included the whole table in the swing of his fork. "By the lord, I was looking at a marriage certificate! It's a fact! And this is how she reads": With his fork the Colonel traced imaginary lines on an imaginary tree——

"*'To whom it may concern'*": he began pompously . . .

*"Ten miles from the Yukon on the banks of this lake,
For a partner to the Koyukuk, McGillis I'll take.
We have no preacher and we have no ring,
It makes no difference, it's all the same thing.*

(Signed) 'Aggie Dalton.'

"And below it was this:

*"I swear by my gee-pole under this tree,
A faithful husband to Aggie I always will be.
I'll love and protect this maiden so frail,
From the sour-dough stiffs on the Koyukuk Trail.*

(Signed) 'Jack McGillis.'

"And then, by the lord, came the crowning touch:

*"For two dollars apiece in cheechako money,
I unite this couple in holy matrimony.
He be a miner and she be a teacher.
I do the job just as good as a preacher.*

(Signed) 'French Joe.'

"There, Sasha," he finished, helping himself to creamed new potatoes, "how'd you like to be wed under such circumstances, eh? I bet Madam Grundy threw a fit. But I'm here to tell you, children, that this same wedding, without benefit of clergy, you might say, was the beginning of the happiest partnership I know. McGillis struck it rich a few years ago, and he and Aggie have a prune ranch down in California now. They lead an ideal life, absolutely. They stay down there among the prunes four months of the year, and the other eight they spend in Alaska on Jack's claim."

"Dad wrote me they passed through Juneau on their way south the other day, Colonel Jeff," Sasha interrupted, drawing her father's letter from her pocket. She unfolded it, slipping one page over another as she searched for the paragraph. "Oh, bother, I can't find it just now, but Dad also says he's finding wonderful data in the library down there, so many new things that it will take him longer than he expected to finish his book. The Governor's greatly interested in his history, too, and is doing everything he can to help Dad. But Colonel—listen to this. It worries me a little." A faint frown marked a line between her brows as she read from her father's letter :

"The Governor tells me that many complaints are coming in from the islands used for raising foxes in Southeastern Alaska; that they are being invaded by strangers who kill or carry away domesticated and privately owned foxes. So much of this is being done that the Government is sending out secret service men to trace these fox-pirates. If anything of this nature

happens along the Aleutians, Sasha, have the Colonel go to Kodiak and wire me at once.'"

She ceased reading and looked up at the old man, anxiety in her eyes. "But nothing like that has happened in this section of Alaska, has it, Colonel Jeff?"

"No, no, my dear," he replied with conviction. "Thank God we live so far away from civilization that we're practically immune from the criminal element. I always did say that Southeastern Alaska was about the most lawless place—outside of the United States, of course. It's too durned close to Canada. What with the rum-runners from Prince Rupert, slipping in and out, and every little bay down there having its own bootlegger, you can't expect anything else. Rum-running, fox-pirating, bootlegging—it's all of a piece, I tell you!" And the Colonel, who, if left alone, could trace all calamities and crime to Prohibition, launched out on his favorite topic. "As for fox-poaching," he concluded, "they'd never come this far west. But I'll ask Nick to keep his ears open. He got two men in from the West'ard today. If there's any fox-lifting going on in this vicinity, Nick will be the first to know of it. He handles all the furs from this section of the country, you know." The old fellow nodded reassuringly. "Don't worry your pretty head about that, Sasha."

When the meal was over the girl disappeared, while Zoya busied herself clearing the table. Gary followed the Colonel's example and sought a comfortable chair for his smoke, questioning the Alaskan, in the meanwhile, about the business of fur-farming.

"Sasha will be out in a minute," the Colonel concluded, "and then, my boy, you'll begin to learn the fox business for yourself. I'll carry the feed to the stations nearest the house, and she's going to take you to the stations on the outer beach of the Island. We're giving them raw salmon today, instead of cooked food. By the lord, Gary, do you know, the Rocking Moon ranch is a regular fox Waldorf-Astoria! Sasha pampers her foxes as if they were babies—and she's got a menu a foot long for 'em. But the specialists say that it takes a gentle person to rear a gentle animal, so maybe that's why her Blues are the best in Alaska." The Colonel surrounded himself with a smoke cloud, enjoying it a moment in silence. "Foxes," he continued, dabbing the air with the stem of his pipe, "foxes are damned dainty animals, Gary, there's no getting around that. They're as erratic in their feeding as a prima donna, too. Why, my boy, when Mrs. Baranoff had her pups this June she got that sulky and high-falutin' that she refused to eat *anything*, and she with eight puppies each worth a hundred and fifty dollars or more this December. Sasha was all wrought up about her for a spell, and tried to tempt her with all kinds of delicacies. She wanted her to take milk for the sake of the pups, you know, but that onery vixen just stared out of her burrow with a go-to-blazes look, and refused to eat. Finally Sasha remembered that Mrs. Baranoff liked clams—and didn't that girl get the largest clam shells she could find, and fill 'em with milk, and by the lord, Gary, Madam Baranoff took all she could get!" The Colonel slapped his knee and laughed in delight. "Put one over on the old lady that time, all right."

Gary listened with interest to the little human details of this new industry of the North—the last effort of Alaskans to make a living in their own country under the strangling restrictions of red tape imposed on them by a bureaucracy five thousand miles away. The Colonel went on explosively to tell how this set of thirty-seven bureaus at Washington, D. C., had hermetically sealed for posterity Alaska's coal, oil and timber, but they had not yet succeeded in performing an abortion on the fox industry, and more than a million and a half dollars were already invested in the one hundred and fifty fur farms of the territory.

Colonel Jeff's profane and earnest discourse was at its height, when Sasha, slim and boyish in knickers and a heavy white sweater, appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. She was without a hat, and a light rifle hung over her back by a strap.

She smiled as the Colonel clipped a vociferous sentence in the middle.

"All ready for business, now!" she announced, and after a word to Seenia she led the way out across the veranda. Alexander, the fox, uncurled from a porch chair and followed at her heels. Gary attached himself to the procession heading for the float where the *Simmie and Ann* swung at her moorings.

The trim whiteness of the launch had borrowed a rosy glow from the coral clouds which heralded the sunset. The wind had died away leaving the bay reflecting the tints of the sky. At this hour of the waning day gulls and blackbirds were mute, as if they, too, felt the peace that was enveloping the Northern world.

Sasha sprang aboard the launch and stepped into the wheel-house. In a business-like way she slipped

the rifle from her shoulder and set it in a corner. Her hands sought the spokes of the steering-gear as if she liked the feel of them, and she leaned over to look out the open window, wrinkling her nose like a small wild thing, as the redolence of the forest struck across the cool sea-water.

"I'll take the wheel." She turned to nod as Gary made his stooping way into the engine room.

A couple of half-revolutions of the fly-wheel, a few hollow coughs, a whiff of gasoline, and the mechanism responded in slow, rhythmic throbs that vibrated from stem to stern. At the movement Gary felt that thrill which comes to all those who love the ways of ships—that buoyant sense of "going somewhere."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Gary came up out of the engine room into the greater freedom of the wheel-house, Sasha was rounding the *Simmie and Ann* on her course along the beach toward Lampadny Point. He took his place back of her, and through the open window watched the changing shore-line, not more than fifty feet away.

Along the curved, gray shingle foxes scampered, stopping now and then to tumble and play like frolicsome puppies. Some sat sentinel-like on drift-logs waiting for their supper-time. Others thrust sharp, inquisitive noses out from behind boulders, watching with shrewd, yellow eyes. Suddenly Sasha made a megaphone of her hands, and sent out the thin, wild bark of the fox. In a moment eager answering yelps drifted across the quiet water with querulous distinctness. She looked up at Gary laughing.

"You see," she said, nodding, "I can talk fox with them." Her hands fell on the wheel again. "I have two feeding stations along here," she continued. "Next year I hope to have all my foxes on this side of the Island. They are much tamer than those living on the outer beach. See those darlings!" she directed, pointing to three weird, small faces peering cautiously at them above a log. "They are this year's puppies. They all love to come out at evening-time and play along the beach."

In Gary's mind the fur trade had always been associated with romantic hardships—the romance of hunters and trappers snowshoeing their lonely ways along the trap-line, across snowy steppes and through icy cañons, in order that Beauty might wrap her white shoulders in furs. And in the background had lurked the grisly specter of Cruelty. He knew little of fur-farming.

"I thought foxes were raised in captivity on these ranches," he began.

"It depends on the kind of fox," explained the girl, with an air of experience that sat quaintly upon her. "Silver-grays do well in captivity, but the Blues, in this part of Alaska, do not. You see, before I persuaded Dad to let me go into this business, I read everything I could find on the subject—and then I went ahead and formulated my own method. A fox loves to run—run as fast as he can. He must stretch his little legs and spring free, hunting and playing and climbing with his mate; nosing about the stumps and the grass and the rocks. I couldn't bear to think of penning the small wild things up in a runway enclosed, even on top, with heavy wire netting, so my Rocking Moon Blues run free and mate according to instinct. They have their burrows, for the most part, along the cliffs in the wildest places, and they make a hundred trails through the forest. The foxes in each colony must keep to the colony trail, or there's trouble, for they're as clannish as—as Alaskans, you know. I'm familiar with every burrow on the Island."

"Rocking Moon looks like a paradise for foxes," commented Gary as he watched the playful antics of the animals on the shore.

The girl steered round a great boulder showing its head above the water. "It is," she answered enthusiastically. "In the spring they get eggs from the crags where the seabirds nest. They have wild berries in the woods and they can get clams and small fish at low tide for themselves. You should see one of them lying beside a rock-pool, fishing, Mr. Tynan! He waits, head on one side, and paw raised for the tiny fish to dart out from under the seaweed, then—quick, like that, he gets it!" She made a swift motion with her hand to show him. "Sometimes a clever one will reach a paw in and roll over a small stone to get something he wants."

"But why, with all this natural food, do you feed them?"

"Because the especially prepared food I give them every other day insures pelts so soft, so thick, so lustrous—but there! You have just to look at Alexander sitting up in the bow, Mr. Tynan. His fur will not be prime for three months yet, but see his color—it is blue of the shadows that lie between snowdrifts under a winter sun!" She turned her vivid face toward him.

The fox, hearing his name, looked back at his mistress, then rose and came toward her. He settled himself on his haunches below her, outside the window of the wheel-house.

"Alexander evidently approves of you," she continued. "Otherwise he never would have come with us this evening. Now, when Nicolai—" she stopped, catching her full under-lip between her teeth. "Yes, foxes *are* friendly creatures," she went on with hurried indirectness. "Some of them that live on this side of the Island are so tame they actually come into the

house, and we have to be careful or they'd establish themselves on the living-room couch!"

"This is the first time I've ever seen a fox that wasn't about a woman's throat," said Gary, resting his elbow against the window and settling himself to watch the course of the launch.

Sasha Larianoff turned to him with a faintly museful look in her eyes. "How different we are," she observed. "Now I—I've never seen a fox about a woman's throat. Up here no one wears furs unless the weather gets so cold it is necessary—and then it takes more than one to keep a person warm. You know, I can't understand a woman's wearing the skin of an animal just for display. It must be the same instinct that prompts the savage to wear a string of bear claws about his neck. But then—I've never been outside of Alaska."

She evidently took his look to be one of surprise, for she hastened to add: "But I'm not without knowledge of other lands. Oh, no! For in books—ah, I have been *everywhere*! The printed page is my magic carpet. In books I become what I please, I go where I please. I voyage to China, to the United States, to Russia, to the South Seas!" She indicated each country with a movement of her hand. "All these strange and beautiful places are known to me. But—perhaps you have really been to some of them, Mr. Tynan?"

Gary was conscious of a hint of wistfulness in the amber eyes she raised to his. He was beginning to find the husky note in her voice singularly charming.

"I have never been to the South Seas," he answered, "but to the others—yes."

"You must tell me of them before you go south

again," she said. Her capable little hands moved rapidly on the wheel as the boat rounded Lampadny Point and met the gentle swell of the ocean.

The launch stood farther off from the shore, now. Above the rice-grass Gary marked the cross of Father Paul standing out against the growing splendor of the evening sky. In answer to his query the girl told him of the old Russian monk whose ways of brotherly love and sacrifice had endeared him, not only to his contemporaries, but to the generations succeeding them. She described for him the summer pilgrimages of remembrance, described them in her engaging, individual way that had in it the half-Oriental intensity of the Russian, and the pictorial clearness of the Alaskan.

Something in the naïve and simple medieval faith of old Muscovian custom surviving in this frontier land touched Gary with a peculiar poignancy. He had been so recently in the country of its origin, where Bolshevism, crying: "Religion is the opium of the people!" was ruthlessly stamping out this very thing that Russia's spiritual adventurers of the past had given their lives to plant in the hearts of an alien and semi-barbarous people. As he listened to the girl, he wondered if she, who read so enthusiastically and perhaps so wistfully of the far-away places of the world, had any conception of the lonely beauty and strangeness of her own land.

When she ceased speaking they were both silent for a time, with that companionable silence that comes naturally to those of the North. The muffled throb of the engine, combined with the vibration of the launch, was curiously detaching in its effect on Gary. It

soothed his material being into a pleasant calm, while it sharpened his spiritual perception.

He watched the low dunes of Lampadny Point slip by. The coast of Rocking Moon grew more rugged, rearing precipitous, spruce-crowned cliffs back of its narrow, pebbled beaches. Bared by the tide, these shingles lay like crescents between the seaward-pointing fingers of the reefs. The tang of growing kelp and seaweed came to him. Down the coast point after point thrust dark lines of rocks out into the slumbering, rose-tinged water. Chameleon-like, the sea had taken on the opalescent color of the sky, and its calm glory contrasted with the wild, darkening shore made him feel as if he were on the eve of some great adventure. His surroundings quickened his imagination, and put a glamour on all things. He was glowingly aware of his own youth and strength, and that of the girl beside him. For no particular reason he was convinced that life here was good; it was clean; it was beautiful, and as unrestricted as the sweep of sea and sky.

The girl's voice aroused him. "The first feeding-station is here between these two reefs," she said, heading the craft toward the shore where the cliffs were cut by a grassy, sloping V. When the *Simmie and Ann* was brought to anchor a short distance from the beach, the skiff that had been in tow astern was drawn alongside. Sasha leaned in the doorway of the wheel-house and directed him as he forked the salmon from the pit into the boxes aboard the smaller boat. When this was accomplished he helped the girl to the skiff, where she seated herself in the stern, placing her rifle across her knees. The clank of the oar-locks came back in musical echoes from the cliffs as Gary rowed landward, and

presently the prow nosed its way among floating amber rockweed and fluted brown ribbons of kelp until it grounded with a soft thud on the shingle.

"This looks like a Chinese outfit." Gary's grin was boyish as he shouldered a wooden yoke from which were suspended two kerosene cans full of salmon—"only it has a wing-and-wing effect, instead of the fore-and-aft." He hitched his shoulders under the edge of the yoke, and steadying the cans with his hands, started up the pebbly slope.

The loaded cans were heavy and in the shifting fine gravel his feet seemed suddenly weighted as he had known them to feel in dreams. The fact that he was closely attended by the young mistress of Rocking Moon prevented his showing his disapproving surprise at the difficulty of the going. Before he crossed many patches of retarding sand, however, he discovered the proper swing that enabled him to progress with greater ease. He noticed that the beach was criss-crossed with the tracks of foxes.

His companion, crunching along in the gravel beside him, stooped to pick up something.

"Look at this!" she exclaimed, holding out the battered shell of a cocoanut. "The drift of many seas comes ashore along these Aleutian Islands." She indicated the high-tide line piled with silvered logs, broken kegs, bits of whale-bone. "But this is the first time I've found a cocoanut shell." Before she tossed it away she held it a moment on the palm of her hand, like a crystal gazer. "Ah, little waif of the seas," she addressed it, with a whimsical shake of her head, "you're a long, long way from your coral strand!"

Their boots crushed the green beach-weed above the

tide line, and the fresh smell of it mingled with the strong iodine odor of dried kelp and dead sea things. They approached a high, rocky bank at the base of which boulders lay piled one on top of another. Bluebells grew in every nook and cranny and small, storm-dwarfed spruce trees, like witches' gnarled hands, thrust out between the crevices. From afar up the shore came the yapping of a sentinel-fox warning his colony of their approach. Gary felt the appeal of the wild loneliness about the shore as he followed Sasha up a gully leading to the top of the bank.

They came out in a growth of wild rice and Indian celery. With a sigh of relief he lowered the cans to the ground and slipped the yoke from his shoulders. Although in perfect physical condition, his experiences of the morning had left him with recurrent spells of dizziness.

As he wiped his perspiring brow with his handkerchief a quick move on the part of his companion attracted his attention. Sasha slipped her rifle-strap from her shoulder and raised the weapon. He followed the direction of her aim. His eye had just succeeded in finding an eagle sitting high in a spruce, then he heard a report and the whine of a bullet. The great bird, with sprawling legs and wings, bumped down through the dark pendant branches of the tree.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Gary, admiring her. "You certainly can shoot!"

"Yes." Her voice was matter-of-fact. "I need to know how. You see, eagles are the greatest enemies my fox puppies have. They carry them off as if they were rats." She slipped the rifle-strap over her shoulder again.

"Our national bird is out of favor in Alaska then."

"He is. He's a menace to all kinds of wild life up here—birds, fish and even animals as large as deer. Dad wrote me the other day about passing one of those tiny islets—little more than rocks—that are so numerous near Juneau. Two young deer had gone over to it evidently at low tide, and been caught when the water rose. They were dashing frantically about, Dad said, like mad things, while a flock of perhaps twenty-five eagles swarmed around them rending and pecking at their eyes. They were blind, of course, when Dad got there, and nearly torn to pieces. He had to shoot them, poor little things, to put them out of their agony. Oh-o-o!" she shuddered. "I can't bear to think of it! It makes my heart hard toward the eagles—until after I've killed one and seen it limp and huddled at the foot of a tree. . . . Life is so cruel, and so beautiful, and so mixed up, some way."

She did not wait for him to speak but made her way along a thread-like trail toward a spruce a few yards distant. Beneath its spreading branches, half hidden in the tall grass, lay a low, flat, box-like affair made of rough lumber. Penetrating as the smell of ammonia came the musky wild odor of foxes.

"These are the box-traps and the feeding-box," announced Sasha.

The latter was a long, narrow wooden tunnel, closed at one end. Near the closed end on top was a lid covering an opening into which the food was placed. The box-traps were made after the same pattern, but were smaller.

"You see," explained the girl, "when trapping sea-

son comes, the foxes have all become so accustomed to entering the feed-box for their food that they have little hesitancy about going into the box-traps when we place it there. Each trap has a drop-door over one end. It is set on a wire, and the food so placed that when the animal goes in to get it, he springs the wire and the door comes down, closing him in. He is then taken out through that slide in the top, you see, unharmed." She showed him how it was done.

"All my foxes are tattooed in the ear. My original stock carries the mark RM—for Rocking Moon, you know, and this year's puppies are marked RM-1, because they are the first of the Rocking Moon breed. None of them are to be killed for pelts. They are more valuable for breeding purposes, and when the time is right we shall trap them and those I intend to sell will be taken to those corrals you saw back of the barn, and kept there until their future owners come for them." She paused to point out to him the eager little faces of several foxes peering from behind tree trunks.

"But when they are taken for the fur," she continued, "the box-trap permits the keeper to select those that are prime only—letting the others free, and then—with just one injection of strychnine into the thoracic cavity the little fellows pass painlessly away almost *instantly*."

Gary, placing the salmon according to her directions, made a general comment contrasting the humane way of trapping with the legalized cruelty of the trap-line. When he finished, she turned to him and spoke with sudden intensity.

"But do you *know* the way of the trap-line—and

that instrument of torture, the steel trap? Do you know how it is hidden in places where the wild things go, its gaping, steel-toothed jaws covered with leaves? Do you know how it closes on the leg of the unwitting animal, crushing its bones, holding the creature there hour after hour, sometimes day after day in agony, in hunger and thirst and cold, until the trapper comes to dispatch it?" The girl's face had grown pale and her eyes nearly black as she spoke. "And do you know that out of every hundred animals so trapped, twenty gnaw off their own feet in order to free themselves? Oh, Mr. Tynan, when I think of the hundreds of hours of torture that go into the making of a fur wrap, I pray for the time when all fur will be raised on fur-farms! But—we won't talk of that any more." She shook her head vigorously. "I shall tell you about my own foxes.

"All the year round, you know, they will go into the boxes for feed, but when the skins are prime—it's a strange thing—some of them develop an intuition that's positively uncanny. Feodor told me that we had three kings last year that were so smart they'd crawl into the trap for food but leave their tails hanging out. The trap-door, of course, dropped down, but when the foxes finished eating, they merely twisted their tails upward, raised the door, and—pooph! out they went free as the birds!"

They laughed in unison as she graphically pantomimed the escape, and Gary bent to examine the traps.

When he raised his head, Sasha was a short distance away in a patch of salmon-berry bushes, popping glistening red berries into her mouth like a little girl. She beckoned him with a stained finger.

"See back there through the trees—that silver gleam?" she called. "That's Toyon Lake. It curves across the Island and the other end of it is not far from the house. I have a bidarka and a rowboat on it. The bidarka is for pleasure; the rowboat for use when the weather is too stormy to take the launch around the Island. We carry the feed with it then to the stations near the lake. . . . We'll get the eagle's feet now, for there's a bounty on them, Mr. Tynan, and then we'll go, for we have many other stations to visit before we go home."

As they were retracing their steps toward the beach Sasha paused at the top of the bank.

"Oh, look at the ghost-moon!" she cried, pointing eastward toward Oo-koon.

Up over the rim of the sea a moth-white moon was rising, though the sun still painted the western sky. "Now we *must* hasten," she said.

She looked up at him, suddenly losing her serious air. "I wonder . . . I wonder if I could beat you to the boat!" she challenged, roguish speculation in her eyes.

Gary was becoming accustomed to her rapid changes of mood. He grasped the handles of his kerosene cans and answered promptly:

"All right, we'll see. One—two—*three!*"

They flew down the gully to the metallic jangle of tin cans, and sped across the shingle. Gary, at the start, had some benign notion of allowing the girl to get ahead of him, but he suddenly found himself hard put to it even to keep up with her. With her white sweater and outspread arms, she skimmed before him like a bird, until, simultaneously, *they arrived*

at the grounded skiff. She sank laughing on the gunwale.

"Of course," she panted, brushing the hair back from her face, "you were handicapped by your cans, so it wasn't really a fair race. Now, Nicolai never will race with me, since we've grown up. He says young women of my age down in the States don't do such things. He—" Again she bit her lip. "But no matter," she continued with her dismissing shake of the head. "We'll get back to the *Simmie and Ann* now, or Alexander will think we've deserted him."

They continued their way to the other feeding-stations. Gary asked the girl questions and she explained the different phases of the work he was to do. When the last box had been supplied, they left behind them the ghost-moon turned to silver.

"We'll go on around the Island, now. It's nearer than going back the way we came," said Sasha. "Full speed ahead, Mr. Engineer!"

The launch shot out beyond a bold, dark headland into the full of the sunset. Everywhere in the west was light and color. The distant mountain range, plumb-tinted and without detail, lay against a glorious expanse of molten gold. A herring-boat, limned in deep purple, chugged toward Rezanoff towing a line of purple dories in its wake. The last touch of the sun gilded the spruce tops on Windward Island. Gary fell further under the spell of the Alaskan night. There was a fascinating unreality about it all, a touch of enchantment. The colors about him were so pure, so clear, so ethereal, he felt as if he had stepped into some exquisite fanciful illustration which depicted a red-headed girl, a fox with weird yellow eyes, and a slim dark

young man driving swiftly over the water in a dream-boat, whose cleaving prow left two lines of amethyst shimmering obliquely across an amber sea.

It was a strange and beautiful world in which he found himself, yet he felt akin to it. And he felt akin to the girl who called it home. What would she say, he wondered, if he, a bearded, smocked and penniless stranger, should place a hand on her sturdy little shoulder and tell her so. The whimsical idea stirred his sense of humor. Perhaps, he thought, a flicker of a smile in his gray eyes, she'd order him to jump overboard, or set Alexander on him. Perhaps—she might even understand that expansive feeling of friendliness and contentment engendered by her country. Anything delightful might happen up here in the North.

His mind lingered on the thought a moment as he glanced at the piquant profile under the tumbled bright hair. Then he realized all at once that he was "broke," he was stranded in a strange land, yet—he was happier than he had been for years. "And can a man be more than happy?" he asked himself, unwittingly speaking the words of the old Irish proverb.

The girl turned to him.

"I must have been thinking aloud," he explained.

"Then *you* feel all this, too!" she spoke half wonderingly, her face brightening with instant comprehension. "And you have lived in the big United States! Oh, I am glad! You see I love my country, and I want others to see in it what I do. I want you to like it especially, for I feel responsible for your troubles. If it had not been for my bad Feodor, you would have been far on your way South tonight."

"I'd rather be here," he answered. An impulse of

confidence led him to continue. "After all, it doesn't matter much where I am. I've been mining in Siberia. Went in by way of Japan after the war was over. But the White Guards and the Bolsheviki are making it too difficult for Americans there. The only thing I was able to bring away with me is this little souvenir of my last meeting with the Reds who confiscated my property. See—" He bent his head and brushed aside the heavy black hair. At sight of the scar the girl gave an exclamation of surprise and concern. "I decided to let things cool down before I went back." As he finished he tossed his head, smoothing the hair back in place. "But my troubles—you mustn't give them a thought, Miss Larianoff. I don't—any more." He leaned back against the wall and laughed down at her, unaware of his own dark picturesqueness as he quoted:

*"Afoot and light-hearted I take the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long, brown path before me leading wherever I
choose."*

"Only it's not a long brown road up here," he concluded, with a wave of his hand ahead of them. "It's a 'path of gold' tonight."

To his astonishment the girl paraphrased;

*"So henceforth you ask not good fortune—you your-
self are good fortune,
Henceforth you whimper no more, postpone no more,
need nothing,
Strong and content you travel the open road!"*

She looked at him and smiled slowly. "You know," she said, "that's the way I like to see a man taking adversity. And Dame Fortune, being a woman, could not desert a man who thinks like that!"

They talked on, now laughing, now serious, but always with a consciousness of delightful personalities yet to be revealed. Presently he took the wheel, and the two fell into silence as the launch rounded Look-out Point into the little home bay. He headed for the float, hidden now in the purple of penumbral shadows.

He was preparing to attend to the mooring of the boat, when Sasha swung her rifle to her shoulder, and with a word to Alexander, started toward the house.

"Good night!" she called. Her friendly voice, with its charming huskiness, floated back through the twilight. "Pleasant dreams!"

At the words a strange little start went through him. They brought his childhood back to him for a moment, vividly, warmingly. His mother had always said: "Good night, dear. Pleasant dreams!" No doubt other women said good night in just that way, but he had never heard it again until now. He, who was alone in the world and homeless, wondered why such a simple thing should bring him a feeling of home.

When the girl vanished he busied himself setting the *Simmie and Ann* to rights for the night. He liked boats, and the task was a pleasure. He finished and stood a while on the float, wiping his hands on a piece of waste, and looking about him with eyes accustomed to noting all the details of his surroundings. The cool tang of salt water and damp wood came up from the logs beneath him. The soft, eager whisper of the incoming tide sounded on the pebbles of the beach. The

moon that he had seen rise silvery and ghost-like from the sea by Oo-koon, now hung high and golden over the dark line of trees inked against the sky back of the ranch-house. As if the beauty of the night had found voice, a golden-crown sparrow, at long intervals, faintly and sleepily sent out its three plaintive, descending notes from the alders where the tree-bells hung.

Presently Gary found himself speculating about Sasha Larianoff and the smoldering-eyed Nicholas Nash. What had happened that afternoon when the trader came to call? What had Colonel Jeff meant when he said: "By God, I hope Nick doesn't get her!"

Gary did not know how long these thoughts occupied him, but when he came back to a consciousness of the present, it was with the feeling that he had been hearing for some time a sound alien to the tranquillity of the night. All the color had faded from the west, and the little tower on top of Lookout Point was a silhouette against a star-pricked sky. Like the quick throb of a heart the sound came floating into the sheltered bay from the outer waters. He turned to look.

Afar and going swiftly toward the east he saw a launch. It was low and almost one with the blurred distance, for it carried no lights. It was not until he turned his steps toward the house that he remembered the launch of Nicholas Nash, with its unmuffled exhaust.

Ten minutes later in his room under the eaves his last thoughts were of the young trader at the wheel of the *Seal Pup* driving his craft recklessly through the night waters, his devil-ridden eyes fixed on—what?

CHAPTER VII

ON a sunny morning two weeks later, Gary came swinging out of the forest, an axe in one hand, a bundle of alder-wood on his shoulder. He was bare-headed and under his heavy black hair his clean-shaved face had an eager boyish look.

He paused before the smoke-house, from the roof of which a thin, blue vapor lent the air a piquancy of hard-wood smoke and curing fish—a tang he already found peculiarly agreeable. He tipped back his head to look up at the sky, exposing the line of his brown, fine-textured throat. A wedge of geese flying south voiced the approach of autumn, and he watched their flight against the blue before he swung the bundle from his shoulder and entered the dim, cool pungency of the smoke-house.

Half-smothered hard-wood coals in the middle of the dirt floor sent up their savor toward the opening in the roof. The light from the doorway fell on rows of steel-blue herring hanging above the fire and red lines of split salmon glazing to an oily brown. Gary dexterously replenished the wood. Afterward he sniffed appreciatively and reaching up cut himself a piece of salmon, rose-pink beneath the smoked outside. He had already proved the truth of the Colonel's statement that a man "got a hankering for smoked salmon."

Through the open door he saw Colonel Jeff, bare-headed and in his shirt-sleeves, stepping along the trail toward the fox corral back of the barn. The Colonel held a bottle of hair tonic carefully in one hand; his mastodon-ivory cane in the other thumped the ground, keeping time to a tuneless, rumbling song. It came out in jerks, as if he were scanning verse:

*"Wheel—the per-am-bu-la-t-or, Bill,
An' wheel—her might-ty slow.
Don't get wild—but mind the child,
Be careful—how—you go—, Damn it!"*

The last words marked a stubbed toe, then the Colonel was on his way again.

*"If you—should round—the cor-ner, Bill,
Or try—to cross—the road,
Just lift—the front—wheels up—a bit,
An' don't—up-set—the load!"*

He set the bottle on the ground with a grunt, and opened the door of the corral. Once inside he shook the tonic vigorously.

"My dear fellow," he spoke conversationally, though no one was in sight, "the enjoyment of alcohol, as you no doubt know, has been confined by law to the upper classes. I'm surprised, sir, surprised that you fail to appreciate what I have for you." The Colonel paused, looking expectantly over his glasses at the far corner of the pen.

A weird, tiny face appeared in the opening of a low, wooden den. Two yellow unblinking eyes stared out

for an instant, then a small creature, resembling a Mexican hairless dog, came trotting out into the sunlight.

"Good morning, Sampson!" Colonel Jeff addressed the ugly mite heartily. "Good morning, you poor little son-of-a-gun!" Through the meshes of the wire netting Gary saw him thrust the point of his cane into the ground and sit heavily on a box, placing the bottle beside him. The animal advanced, until the Colonel put out both hands and picked it up. He stretched it across his knees with clumsy gentleness. There it lay in perfect trust, while the old man poured a bit of the liquid into the palm of his cupped hand.

"Sampson, my lad," he wrinkled his nose until his glasses moved up and down, "this darned stuff smells bad enough to grow whiskers on a baby's chin." He slapped the tonic on the animal's back. "I—" The sentence ended with a low whistle as he bent to scrutinize Sampson.

"By the—syncopated—damn!" he bellowed with delight. "I believe I *do* see hair! Hey! That you, Gary?" He looked up to see the young man standing at the door of the corral. "Come in here. I've got something to show you." The little fox gave a squirm of enjoyment.

"Doesn't that look like the beginnings of fur?" the Colonel demanded triumphantly as Gary approached. He pointed to the back of the hairless Sampson. "I've used everything from mange cure to crude oil, and by the lord, it's *time* Nature was doing her part!"

"But why all this barber-shop stuff, Colonel Jeff?"

"Well, it's like this, my boy. About one in every two hundred fox pups comes hairless--'Sampsons' the

ranchers call 'em. That means death to the little cusses—no fur, no live. Of course, Feodor and I could have killed this one before Sasha learned of it—as other ranchers generally do. But, some way, I hated to do it before I gave him a chance. . . . And then the labels on those bottles of hair tonic are so blamed enticin', you know. But what do you think—"Colonel Jeff looked up hopefully over his glasses. "Don't it look like hair?"

The young man good-naturedly examined the faint fuzz on the creature's back, and if he had any doubt, his hearty "yes" did not betray it. He held the bottle, dropping the dark liquid on Sampson's hide while the Colonel rubbed it in.

Gary's two weeks as a substitute for the bibulous Feodor had brought him into a delightful world of new activities. Farm life on Rocking Moon was like nothing he had ever read of or known. Against the background of his memory he arranged his meager knowledge of agricultural labor in the States. At best there was associated with it always an element of drudgery:—the dust of traveled roads; long hours of harvesting in the broiling sun; physical weariness that rendered a man fit only for sleep at the end of the day. This much he knew from observation.

Up here, where he was actually performing the work of the "hired man," he could say with truth: "I rise at dawn from a bed of perfect health, refreshed, singing, inhaling the ripe breath of Autumn!"

Those mornings of a year or more ago seemed like a dream now—a nightmare, though the memory of their slow horror sometimes came back to threaten him. The awakening with a dull sense of the utter futility

of everything; the black, stagnant hours at his typewriter waiting in vain for ideas, fumbling in the dim, crowded chaos of his brain for words, which once had overwhelmed him with a very ecstasy of creativeness; the despairful facing of the fact that he had lost his power to write, lost it just as he had begun to have success in the short-story field of literature. And the greatest horror of it was that he could see no reason for it. He was physically fit, but mentally he had come back from the war old at thirty-one. And yet—he was also pitifully like a very small boy who has awakened alone in the dark, and fearful, gropes for some one to cling to; some one to comfort him. Only the evening before, as he and Sasha stood on Look-out Point watching the sunset from the watch-tower, he was on the point of telling her all this. But he did not. How could he tell her that he had given up the work he loved best in the world because every effort of his to concentrate brought forth hideous, shadowy images that loomed through the reek and fog of high explosives; men sprawled in grotesque fantastic attitudes of death; men horribly engrossed in plugging their own gaping wounds that oozed slow red streams. He could not tell her because he feared she might think him a weakling. Instead he talked to her of hay-cutting, for it was harvest time.

Heights above the sea always brought Gary a feeling of exhilaration, and he liked to recall the consciousness of sheer youth and strength that possessed him when he and the Colonel swung their scythes through the sweet, wild hay that grew in the meadows skirting the edge of the cliffs. The sea-wind tempered the sunshine, and ruffled his hair. Gulls soared and

slanted companionably over him. Blackbirds chattered intimately to him from the forest as he worked.

Afterward, with Sasha and Zoya, who insisted on helping, they tied the hay into fish-netting and, to the accompaniment of shouts and laughter, rolled the bundles to the lip of the cliffs, sending them whirling to the beach far below. Then came the loading of the big dory, and the towing of it home in the wake of the *Simmie and Ann*, while the two girls sat on top of the load singing old Russian melodies, the harmony of which came to Gary above the throb of the engine.

There had been other days when the young man and Colonel Jeff went to the nearest cannery and brought back a launch-load of salmon. Gary had come to take a positive pleasure in his deftness at cleaning, splitting and salting down fish. The two great vats in the barn were full now, one with salmon and one with salmon-heads for the foxes; and the winter store of smoked fish for the table was well on the way.

One day Sasha had taken him down into the cellar and with housewifely pride had shown him her provisions, everything gathered, as the Colonel had said, from the storehouse of old Mother Nature. Row after row of glass jars made the shelves colorful and singularly tempting, revealing, as they did, the cream-white of clams, the red and yellow and blue of wild berries, the transparent amber and garnet of jellies, the rose-lavender of preserved rose-petals, which the mistress of Rocking Moon served with her Russian tea. There were buckets of sea-gull eggs and sea-parrot eggs, which Sasha and Zoya had gathered from the cliffs in June, and put down in water-glass; small barrels of silver eulicon, the finest fish that swims; and, hidden

discreetly in the shadow of the stairway, a keg of salmon-berry juice, which, in the absence of Father Anton, was undergoing unlawful fermentation under the expert guidance of Colonel Jeff, who daily assured the protesting Sasha that he was making the wine for medicinal use only.

All this old-fashioned preparation for the winter brought Gary a feeling of homely comfort. He remembered experiencing the same thing when he read certain of Whittier's poems. He, too, was beginning to know that contentment and simple happiness which comes of living close to Nature and trusting in the land. Alaska in summer was a gay, kind young mother pouring out her bounty with the prodigality of youth to those who would receive it.

He spilled another small stream of hair restorer on the back of the hairless Sampson, and as the Colonel rubbed it in, the cheechako began reluctantly counting off the days until the next steamer should arrive to take him on his way south. The world of wars and strikes and business strife suddenly seemed very far away, very undesirable, and strangely unimportant.

Meanwhile the Colonel rubbed and talked.

"It's like meandering along the back trails of the past, talking to you, my boy," he said, slipping from one incident to another. "Now there's my friend Split-the-Wind," he continued, giving Sampson a last rub before setting him down on the ground. "He was an Eskimo. Gave me that cane—" He handed the object to Gary, pointing out the small pieces of hollowed-out ivory that were slipped over a steel rod to make it strong. "Nice work, that, eh? He was a clever cuss, in more ways than one. 'Most too clever." The Colo-

nel chuckled. "He saw that the missionaries rarely did any manual labor—which is the only kind of work the Eskimo knows—and still they apparently collected enough money to live on. He just couldn't get it through his head. One day he asked the clergyman in charge of the mission at Kobuk what he did to *earn* that money. 'Preach the gospel, and collect in the name of God!' answered the good man.

"Well, Split-the-Wind pondered on this a long time, and then he quit fishing and went to the next village where there was no church. He got a crowd of natives together and made a speech. Afterward he took up a collection. He repeated this week after week until the church people got wind of it and had him arrested, by the lord! . . . Well, I was Commissioner then at a little camp to the West'ard, and Split was brought before me for trial." The Colonel laughed reminiscently as he knocked the bowl of his pipe against the edge of the box. "My boy, I didn't know what to do. I looked at him as sternly as I could and said: 'Now look, here, Split! Don't you know you've been collecting money under false pretenses, and that makes you all same thief?' The old devil looks at me with that darned innocent look those people can get. 'Oh, no-o-o-o! No-o-o-o!' he protested, shaking his black head. 'Me no thief. Me *g-o-o-t* man. Me preach Gospel—all same him—' he pointed out the indignant minister. 'Then me say: For God's sake, give *me* money! Me no say: Give me money for *God's* sake!'"

The Colonel finished his impersonation of the Eskimo with a hearty laugh and a resounding slap on his knee. "Nick always enjoyed that story, Gary," he went on, as he lighted his pipe. "Nick hasn't much

use for the missionaries or the priests. By gosh! I wonder what's happened to the boy lately. He hasn't been over to see Sasha since you came, Gary. I heard he was on a *macoola* spree last week, though. He can go just so long without drinking, and then—look out. . . . A lot of the natives think he's in league with the Old Boy himself because he's just leased the Island of Oo-koon for a fox-ranch. None of them will go near it for love nor money, not only on account of the volcano, which is as safe as God's pocket, but the great Cave of Oo-koon is full of mummies—or it used to be. The Aleuts used to embalm their dead, you know, and hang 'em, like strings of peppers, in caves. Devilish gruesome, to my mind. That's why I can't figure out why Nick took that island, because he'll always have to get outsiders to work there for him. . . . We must take a run over there some day, Gary, after our heavy work is over. He's just getting started." The old man rose and stood on wide-spread legs stretching luxuriously. "Heigh-o!" he yawned, glancing up at the sky. "Looks as if we might have a blow before night."

The sun shone, but the blue was streaked with wind-clouds like bits of blown chiffon, and fitful gusts came whispering through the alders, setting the tree-bells tinkling. The murmur of the sea had deepened to a muted hollowness. From the height where they drew a black line against the clouds the calling of geese came down—*on-konk—on-konk—on-konk*.

"See how low they're flying! Sure sign of a storm," prophesied the Colonel, squinting upwards. "She'll blow, all right, and there'll be a lot of birds coming in to Toyon Lake. I wouldn't be surprised, Gary, if

you'd get some good shooting there late this afternoon. . . . How you coming on with the bidarka?"

"Fine, though I'm far from expert yet. It's great sport," Gary replied, stopping to watch Sampson scramble to the top of his den, before he and Colonel Jeff went their respective ways.

Gary had been looking forward to the opening of the shooting season, both because he wanted to supply the household with enough ducks for the winter canning, and because travel in the bidarka, which floated light as a bubble on the waters of Toyon Lake, was fascinating. The least motion of the double paddle sent it skimming swiftly along the surface of the lake like a waterbug. Several times he had carried it across the short distance between the end of Toyon and the ocean, and launched it in the sea. It took greater skill to manage the cranky little craft on the rollers, but Gary, after repeated duckings, had mastered it one Sunday, while Sasha instructed him from the shore.

When the young man finished his day's work, the afternoon was far gone and Colonel Jeff's prediction of a storm was coming true. Blue sky and sunshine had given place to the fantastic beauty of mauve clouds driven before a swift wind. The forest back of the ranch-house rocked in a very abandonment of freedom and mingled its exultant voice with that of the rising sea. Rain would come later. The buffetings of the wind exhilarated Gary. Sasha, too, seemed to be sensitive to the stimulation of the storm, for as he ascended the steps of the wide veranda he heard her playing Tschaikovsky—lusty, virile chords in keeping with the spirit of the borning gale. She, like all Alaskans, rarely complained about the weather. These Northern-

ers looked upon it as something to be enjoyed in all its moods, like an ever changing spectacle put on for them by a master stage director.

As Gary entered the living-room, taking with him a breath of out-of-door freshness, Sasha looked up from the piano, one hand poised for the striking of a chord, and smiled at him. She had delightful little mannerisms in playing, copied unconsciously from her emotional Russian father, who had been her only teacher.

"I'm going to run over to the Lake before supper and get a few ducks," announced Gary, passing on through to the back hall where the rifle and shot-gun hung on the gun-rack.

"*Just* what I've been wanting to do," approved Sasha, rising promptly. "Wait for me, Gary." She disappeared into her own room off the living-room.

When he took down the shot-gun he remembered he had left his shell-vest upstairs in his room. He ran up the steps and started along the dim, unfinished hall, past the rooms of Zoya, Seenia and the Colonel. His own lay under the sloping eaves at the other end. Suddenly he stopped, his head in the alert attitude of listening. The noise of the rising gale had rendered inaudible the pad of his rubber-soled tennis shoes; but it did not prevent his hearing a peculiar, weird crooning that threaded through the sound of the wind. For a moment he could not locate the source of it—then comprehension came. It was Seenia in her room. Perhaps, he thought, she was afraid of the storm. Devout old soul, no doubt she was praying.

He smiled indulgently as he tiptoed past her half-open door. He could hear her plainly now. Her words were English, but—Gary stiffened—they rose

in an eerie chant of broken minors—a cadence older by thousands of years than Christianity.

“Spirits—I call! I call!” The thin old voice soared and sank. “Come to me—on the wind—the East wind of Oo-koon. . . . Spirit of my father, the whaler. . . . Spirit of my mother, the dancer. . . . Come to me. Tell me truth. . . . Spirit of fire—spirit of Oo-koon, come to me. Tell me truth! Where is it? Oh, where does it hide?”

Gary felt a queer, prickling thrill pass through him. He glanced into the room. The native woman squatted flat on the floor before her low window that faced the East where the gray bay whitened under the lash of the wind. Her body was huddled strangely. A second later, shamed by his involuntary eavesdropping, he hurried past the door to his own room.

Seenia! Seenia, whom he had seen each day crossing herself devoutly every time she passed the icon in the living-room, was calling for help—and she called on the heathen spirits of her ancestors!

CHAPTER VIII

GARY'S mind was still busy with the strange scene upstairs when he rejoined Sasha in the living-room. But he said nothing to her about it.

The girl was clad in a native kamelayka, a water-proof shirt with a hood, made of walrus-gut, thin and transparent like oiled silk. It was yellow and light as gauze, and its many seams were picked out with bits of gay colored yarn. She handed Gary a garment like her own. "It will be raining before we get back," she said.

She swung along the path before him, her arms stretched out like wings to the buffeting of the wind. On each side of them the rice-grass lay over as if pressed down by some invisible giant hand. At the float, even in the sheltered bay, the *Simmie and Ann* was bobbing up and down, sprayed by foam and spin-drift. The basso of the sea, sounding with increasing volume, told of the mounting breakers beating against the outer cliffs of Rocking Moon.

"Oh, how glorious, Gary!" she called back. "The storm always says: 'Come out and play! Come let me toss you in my mighty arms!' . . . Look!"

They both stopped, looking upward. A flock of swans was flying low, with human-like cries bewildered and lonely. "See how they all keep time!" The girl

made a flying motion with her hands. "The Aleuts say they call that way to encourage each other to keep the stroke with their wings on the long journeys."

"Like sailors singing chanties at their work," suggested Gary. "*Row, brothers, row!*" he sang, and Sasha joined him instantly, while both of them kept time with their hands. At the end of the verse they faced one another, and laughed, delighted with themselves. A few vagrant, wind-driven drops splashed against their faces.

Before they entered the narrow trail that led through the forest to the Lake, their kamelaykas were shedding rivulets of water.

But beneath the high, rocking branches of the trees it was still, and cool, and dim as twilight. Not a drop had yet penetrated to wet the moss and brown spruce needles which upholstered the ground between the tree trunks. Yet everywhere stirred the savor of clean earth, and bark, and fallen leaves. The crashing of the storm passed high overhead, giving Gary a new keen realization of physical safety which had in it a touch of primitive satisfaction. He felt that it must be a feeling akin to that pleasure and comfort which wild things know when they are snuggled in moss-lined burrows under the roots of trees. He smiled at himself, as he recognized Sasha's influence in this thought that had come to him. She was forever telling him the ways of wild things in a curious intimate fashion, just as a girl in the States might chronicle the doings of her chums.

He glanced at the little figure swinging sturdily along beside him. She had been silent for some time. Wisps of bright hair escaped from the edge of the kamelayka

hood, framing her rain-wet face. She looked very small among the great brown trunks of the trees, like some elfin creature in a forest fairy tale. He found himself marveling again at this child-woman, whose only knowledge of civilization had been gained through books and the occasional mediocre moving-pictures that once or twice a year came to Rezanoff.

She was a girl who could lay aside the most feminine bit of sewing, and come, eager as an adventurer, to hang over a chart of Alaskan waters, or a map of foreign lands. The two had already spent delightful hours at this sort of map-travel. He had heard her, evenings by the living-room fire, quote gravely some bit of ancient philosophy, and a few minutes later recite for Seenia the lilting *King of the Yellow Butterflies*. He had heard her play the *Song of the Volga Boatmen* with an emotional intensity that plunged him into the sorrow, the labor, the night of Russian peasants drawing their loads ploddingly along the marge of the swift-running river; and while the spell of this was yet upon him, she had dashed off into a flippant, syncope bit from the latest American musical comedy—this last learned by ear from a phonograph disk. He had listened to her directing Zoya, with the precision and domestic knowledge of a New England housewife, and come upon her immediately after, squatted before the patient but bored Alexander, whose front paws she would be patting together forcing him to keep time to some foolish little nursery rhyme she was repeating. She was as unconscious of conventions as a baby, and once having admitted him to her friendship she treated him with boyish camaraderie. He found her wholesome joyousness singularly refreshing. *Solnishko*

moyo, my little sun, was the endearing name Zoya often called her. It suited her, somehow. He did not wonder that Nicholas Nash wanted her. Yet he found himself hoping, as fervently as the old Colonel, that the trader would not get her. And he, Gary, had known her only two weeks.

They neared the edge of the woods where the wind-ruffled water of the lake showed through the tree-trunks. Sasha, pink of face and sparkling of eye, turned to look up at him.

"We'll take the bidarka here and with the wind behind us, scoot up to the other end to the marshes and the sloughs. That's where the birds take shelter in rough weather," she directed, as they emerged at the water's edge where the reeds bent under the stress of the wind.

The skin boat lay under a tree.

They launched it and before climbing into the man-holes, drew the hoods of the kamelaykas about their faces.

"We'll be as snug and dry as if we were in a submarine," laughed Gary, as, following Sasha's directions, he spread the hem of his water-proof over the rim of the man-hole and tightened the draw-string to keep out the rain.

The bidarka, needing but a touch of the guiding paddle, skimmed like a brown leaf before the wind, while the lapping chop of the lake slapped over it. Slanting rain silvered the green of the trees along the shore. Against his thin kamelayka Gary felt the storm pelt-ing his back, though not a drop came through. It was a delightful sensation—a feeling of safety and of at-one-ness with the elements.

Just so, he thought, had the Aleut sea-otter hunters of Baranoff's time struck out in their bidarkas, scudding before the wind into the very vortex of fearful seas, headed for the lea of Sanak and the Chernaboor Rocks where the otters lay resting from the storm, their globose heads buried in heaps of brown kelp. He never tired of hearing Sasha and the Colonel tell of the days before the Americans came. The stories fired his imagination—though he found himself unable even to outline a plot in which to use any of the story material that lay about him. He planned, before he left the fox-ranch, to take the bidarka across that thirty-mile stretch of sea between Rocking Moon and the Island of Oo-koon—if he could get anyone to occupy the other man-hole. He wondered if Sasha would be afraid to go with him, a cheechako.

He glanced at the back of her head, where her hair showed red-gold through the wet transparency of the kamelayka hood, and shouted the question. But the wind snatched the words off his lips.

Almost too soon the bidarka nosed the reeds at the farther end of the Lake, and Gary, gun in hand, climbed out to the bank. He was soon drenched from the knees down, from crawling through the wet grass to creep up on wild flocks under the lea of the banks. Sasha paddled the boat around to pick up his kill.

At the end of an hour he had a dozen mallard and widgeons, and four geese. He had gone hunting many times in the rice-fields of California, bagging the number of birds allowed by law, but never had he felt just the satisfaction that was his now, when, wet to the skin, and smelling of crushed grass and water-soaked

feathers, he stepped back into the man-hole of the bidarka. Hunting took on an added zest when food, instead of sport, was the object.

Both he and Sasha paddled with all their strength against the wind, making slow time on the homeward stretch. The gale increased, and the scudding clouds descended until they mingled with the tossing tree-tops. The light was growing dim when they drew the bidarka up in its berth, and retraced their steps through the dripping forest, each one carrying a share of the birds. This was Sasha's arrangement.

Laughing, the two stamped into the warm, lamp-lighted kitchen, and laid the result of their hunting at the feet of the welcoming Zoya.

"*Fee, fi, fo, fum!*" Sasha pursed her red lips and spoke with mock ferocity. "I smell beef mull-i-gun! And coffee! And apple something!" She wrinkled her little nose and sniffed hungrily. "Supper isn't over, is it, Zoya?"

"Yes, *solnishko*, but I have for you both a surprise," announced the girl, helping Sasha out of her dripping kamelayka. "I have set for you the small table before the fireplace, so you shall be cozy after your wet hunting. And guess what I have—" she looked at the rain-beaten Nimrods with bright, dark eyes, her teeth showing white in a smile. "I have made very special, very delicious, an *apple cobbler with whipped cream!*" she finished with an air of triumph.

"Oh, glub! glub!" The gusto with which Sasha uttered these cryptic sounds indicated complete appreciation. She threw an arm about Zoya's waist in an affectionate, bear-like hug. "You angel-lamb!"

"I second that remark, Zoya," Gary called out as he

ascended the stairway. "I'm that hungry I could eat boiled owl!"

An hour later the table was cleared and the squat reading-lamp cast its yellow cone of light on every member of the household sitting close to the leaping flames in the fireplace. Alexander had just succeeded for the first time in performing the trick Gary had been trying to teach him for the last week. At the words: "Bring me my coat, Alex!" the fox had dragged the young man's coat to him and dropped it across his knees. The animal stood now with its two forefeet against Gary's chest, snuggling its nose down the neck of his open shirt, while that ticklish young man tried to fish a package of cigarettes from his coat pocket. Sasha and Zoya watched, smiling, from the divan, and the Colonel, from the depths of his own cushioned chair, was using the stem of his pipe to emphasize his comparisons of other storms with the one now raging.

Seenia, who generally sat dozing in the evening, was alert tonight, her deep-set eyes bright like a bird's. When the heavy corduroy curtains, drawn across the windows, swayed in the draft, or the house trembled in the blasts of the gale, she tilted her head as if listening. Gary, watching her, wondered what she could be thinking of—this old woman who had all the Christian virtues, yet who still believed in charms and spells and talked with the dead.

A violent gust of wind struck the house like a giant hand, and the ship's bell outside on the porch sounded a single stroke. Seenia sat up straight in her chair as if some one had called her, and made the sign of the cross. Fear was in her face, but there was also an un-

canny expectancy. Something in her manner drew every eye to her.

"Ah-a-a-a!" Her low tone was almost a whisper, and she held up one wrinkled hand. "My children, it is the East Wind—the Spirit Wind of Oo-koon!" There was a pause, filled with the crackling of the logs in the fireplace. "You will not believe old Seenia, but no other wind comes to ring the bell. . . . Some one travels swift—swift to Rocking Moon tonight!"

"Nonsense, Seenia," Colonel Jeff declared, leaning over and knocking the bowl of his pipe against the andiron. "There isn't a small boat on the Alaskan coast that would venture out on a night like this."

"Some one comes to Rocking Moon," the old woman repeated. And as if she paradoxically hoped for the thing she feared, Seenia placed a brown hand on either arm of her chair and turned her face to the doorway. Despite himself, Gary's eyes followed hers, a tingling sensation at the roots of his hair. He was aware also that Sasha was leaning forward looking expectantly at the Aleut.

"Seenia," she said, "perhaps tonight you can remember. Tell us again the story of the Cave of Oo-koon and the Mask of Jade. Seenia . . . you remember, don't you, the eyeless Mask of Jade? Gary has never heard you tell about it, Seenia."

The brown woman turned her head slowly until her deep, bright eyes rested on the cheechako. A moment she looked at him. Then she spoke.

"I am Christian . . . but I remember other times." She paused, her face taking on a look of abstraction as she gazed into the flickering flames. Gary felt that the room, the people were fading from her conscious-

ness while she threw a bridge across the years to the days of her youth. Then she began her tale in a low, half whispering voice that somehow carried clear above the combined stridor of wind and sea. She wove a spell that made it possible for him to follow her back into the pre-Russian days when her Hyperborean forefathers embalmed their dead and hung the fur-wrapped bodies of great hunters and whalers in the Cave of Oo-koon. She made him see the dim, rocky tomb on stormy nights like this, when the mummies crawled from their wrappings and with masks on their sunken faces, held feasts and festivals, dancing about in skeleton glee to the whistling of the wind. She made him see the living hunters of those times performing the mystic rites of the whaling season, when they won the favor of departed ones by sending the most beautiful of the maidens into the Cave, to dance under the swinging mummies, maidens naked, except for the masks that came to their shoulders.

"Before the Russians—my mother is the most beautiful dancer," Seenia spoke slowly, her eyes on the past. "She tells me. She wears the Mask of Jade. It has no eyes. When she dances beneath the dead, she must see only her own feet through the holes,—so —" She pointed to her nostrils.

"The Russians come. Make all Aleuts Christians. Masks go. Dances go. Only the Mask of Jade is here. . . . Then—I lose it—the Mask of Jade." Her voice rose. "I lose it!" She passed her gnarled hand over her forehead and shook her head. "I pray. I am Christian. But I do not remember."

A mighty blast shook the house and the old woman turned her head in her weird, listening attitude. Sud-

denly it came to Gary that she, who when alone in her room had called on the spirits, was waiting for their message now. "Maybe so . . . maybe so . . . the spirits dance in the Cave of Oo-koon tonight," she whispered loudly. "My father the whaler. My mother the dancer. All—the—dead . . ." Her voice was lost in the wail of another woollie that swooped down on the cabin and shook it as a bear worries a newly caught salmon.

"All—the—dead——"

Everyone in the room was under the old Aleut's witch-like spell. Everyone was listening, even as she was listening. Again the bell outside sounded its single, dim stroke as if a spirit hand had touched it. Then Gary stiffened as if from an electric shock.

There had been no sound of footsteps on the porch, but someone—something—was knocking at the door!

CHAPTER IX

THE knocking was repeated with greater force. Before anyone could shake off the spell Seenia had unwittingly put upon them, the door opened violently. A damp gust of wind flattened the flame of the lamp. When the light flared up again Nicholas Nash was striding into the room.

His dripping black oilskins caught the flicker of the hearth-fire in fantastic zigzags of yellow light, lending him the look of some dark spirit of the storm. His eyes glowed beneath the rain-jeweled brim of his sou'wester, and at the astonishment in the faces before him, he threw back his head and laughed, his teeth flashing in his wet face.

"Hello, everybody!" It delighted him to speak casually. "It's evident you didn't expect a call from me tonight!" He stamped his rubber boots, and shook himself, sending the water flying.

"By the lord, my boy!" bellowed the Colonel, finding voice at last. "I can hardly believe my eyes! Why—why—no boat can live in a storm like this!" He came hastily forward and began to help Nick off with his wet oilskins.

"It'll take something worse than this to drown the *Seal Pup*—when I'm at the wheel, Jeff." Nick slapped the Colonel on the shoulder, and there was a note of exultation in his voice that told how he gloried in his

successful battle with the tempest-tossed North Pacific. "But never mind the coats, Colonel Jeff." He turned toward the door where a rubber-clad man stood leaning against the panels, a suit-case in one hand. "Come here, Side-money. . . . Sasha—" his eyes rested for an uncertain moment on the girl's—"Sasha, can't we go upstairs and change our clothes?"

The mistress of Rocking Moon came forward in response to that first law of the North, the law of hospitality. "Why, of course, Nicolai. . . . Colonel Jeff, will you take them up to Dad's room? And Zoya, please, a fire in the kitchen and some hot food for them when they come down again." Perhaps it was the strange look in the half-breed girl's eyes that caused her to add: "I'll come out and help you in a moment."

Colonel Jeff led off toward the stairs. Nick, following, passed close to the chair of Seenia. The storm had provoked a diabolic activity in him. He leaned down and laughed into the old woman's face, his splendid, arrogant youth in poignant contrast with her age.

"Ah, Seenia," he said wickedly, harking back to boyhood days when he and Sasha had listened together to the Aleut's stories. "It's a night for a witch's brew, old girl. The Devil rides abroad on the backs of the breakers tonight—and *the spirits dance in the Cave of Oo-koon*. I know, for I've just come from there!" He laughed again, as the old woman, her eyes intent on the fire, made the sign of the cross. Seenia refused to grant him even a glance as he stamped off toward the hall followed by Side-money with the suit-case. Neither did she deign to notice the trader fifteen minutes later when he came down stairs in dry clothes and excellent spirits.

His hazard with sea and winds had cleared his mind of all irritability, all resentment against Sasha and the Northern world. After supper he left the table and dropped into an easy attitude, leaning against the mantel, smoking and making himself agreeable, as only he knew how. The urbanity of his Russian blood, combined with the wit of his Irish made him a delightful companion—when he considered his associates worthy of the effort. The Nicholas Nash of tonight was the Nash whom his friends in the States knew.

He was superbly sure of himself, silhouetted slim and tall with the leaping flames of the fire-place at his back. Zoya, from the concealing shadow of the kitchen door, paused often in her work to glance at him adoringly. Sasha, curled among the cushions of the couch, one end of which was occupied by Gary Tynan, turned her eyes thoughtfully from Nick to the cheechako as if comparing the two.

The trader told the news of Rezanoff: Mary Demetroff's prettiest creole daughter was married now to a wireless-station man at Kodiak. The *Starr* was expected from the South on her way to Bristol Bay. A prospector Nick had grubstaked had come back from the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes with his shoes burned off his feet.

Nick's statement that the Big Swede at Rezanoff had succumbed to a batch of his own *macoola* and was under the doctor's care, set the three men off on a spirituous discourse. The potency of *macoola* versus other brands of home brew was discussed. This subject ended when Side-money, silent until then, threw the weight of his evidence to the support of "white mule." Two drinks of this, he said, taken one night

when he was performing his duties as night-watchman aboard one of the Alaska Packers' ships moored off San Francisco, had enabled him to see polar bears on icebergs, floating all about him in San Francisco Bay.

The house shook again in the grasp of the storm, and Nick brought the company back to the present. He told how the *Seal Pup* had scudded before the wind from Oo-koon over combers that threatened to break over the stern every moment, and contrasted this Alaskan gale with one he had known on a mud-buried road in France. The roaring of the sea in the caves about the base of Oo-koon tonight, he said, was like the crash of heavy artillery.

"Why in time you ever picked on that island to locate your fox-farm, my boy, I don't see," remarked Colonel Jeff, his hands tenderly assisting one of his rheumatically inclined legs to cross over the other.

"I'm beginning to wonder myself," answered Nick, with a peculiar smile. "I can't get a native to go near the place—though I thought all that old superstition had died out—" He slanted an eye toward Seenia, sitting stolidly in her chair. "Even Feodor, whom I questioned about it, said he wouldn't live there for love nor money, on account of the mummies. . . . Of course it's ridiculous—all this Aleut foolishness about the Cave, but it forces me, you see, to employ only outside help. I've got two men over there now." He laughed. "Why, we're using the Cave of Oo-koon to store our provisions and fox food in," he added, looking again at Seenia, as if he wanted her to realize the white man's contempt for and defiance of her tribal superstitions.

But Seenia sat in Buddhistic calm. Not even the

tap of the ship's bell outside caused her to move now.

Gary Tynan had been silent for some time, though his gaze had an analytical quality as he studied first one and then another of the group about the fire. Now he expressed an interest in the ranch on Oo-koon, asking Nick about the location of the historic Cave, and the trader's plans for carrying on the industry.

Nick adroitly managed to give him very little information.

"Of course we don't allow visitors on the Island, Tynan," he concluded. "But some day before you go South, I'll take you over there and show you around myself. Let's see, the *Starr* is due back here from Bristol Bay in about two weeks. You'll be taking passage on her, won't you?"

Gary assented. An extra heavy gust of wind tore at the corners of the house and the window hangings stirred in the draft.

"Br-r-r-r!" shivered the Colonel, rising from his chair, and emptying the bowl of his pipe into the fireplace. "Folks, I think we'd all better turn in. D'you want me to go down with you to the float, Gary, and see how the *Simmie and Ann* is resting this wild night?"

"No, thanks, Colonel. I'll run down by myself and take a look at her—and at the *Pup*, too, Nash."

Gary passed into the back hall to put on his oilskins, while the other members of the household went to their rooms.

The storm raged unabated all that night and the next day, making it impossible for any boat to leave the Island. Even in the sheltered bay the float and the moored launches, bobbing up and down, were dimmed

by flying spray. Nicholas Nash continued to make himself agreeable and useful. He spent a few of the morning hours in the barn advising the Colonel of a new treatment that might grow hair on the nude Sampson. He took a turn stirring the great kettle of food which Gary was cooking for the foxes. He set his man Side-money to cutting wood in the shed, while he himself carried it into the kitchen where Zoya, in a spotless pink apron, was moulding loaves of bread, her rounded, tawny arms powdered with flour.

During the afternoon he came in from the barn to find Sasha alone in the living-room trying to wind a skein of yellow yarn. He had made no attempt to see her alone before. She had played hostess to him well, but without that bantering gaiety which had formerly characterized her comradeship with him. Perhaps he missed those teasing ways of which he had complained on the Lookout that day. Perhaps the girl's cool politeness made him value more the warm friendliness of other times. At any rate his face was serious and there was a certain deference in his manner as he stood before her.

"I'd like to help you wind it, Sasha, if you'll let me," he said, tentatively picking up a strand of yarn with his thumb and forefinger.

She assented casually. As he sat opposite her, holding the yellow skein clumsily on his arms, he talked of her father and his work, a subject of which he knew the girl never tired. Yet even this did not lessen the constraint between them.

Half the yarn was wound when Nick, with his usual disregard of consequences, let both arms fall.

"Oh, Sasha," he groaned. "I can't stand this any

longer! Hit me. Kick me. Do anything to me, but don't be so darned polite to me. . . . I realize I made a fool of myself— I don't know what got into me that day on the Lookout—" He rested his elbows on his knees and dropped his face in his hands, the yellow yarn tangling unheeded about his feet. Penitent dejection was in his attitude. A moment later he looked up from his cupped palms. "I'm sorry, Sasha," he said simply. "I won't do it any more."

There was a boyish naïveté in his expression which had won him many a reprieve in his childhood days. Perhaps he knew it was not without its effect now, for he watched the girl a moment, then impulsively held out his hand. "Shake hands with me, Sasha, and give me another trial, won't you?"

It was not Nicholas Nash, champion of the ways of the South, who spoke, but Nicolai the Alaskan. Sasha slowly reached out and clasped his fingers.

"Oh, Nicolai, I——"

The sentence ended abruptly as Gary Tynan entered from the back hall, a firelog on his shoulder. She withdrew her hand and rose, gathering up the yarn with her usual calmness, though her face went pink.

"Will you move, please, Nick, and make room for Gary with the wood," she directed.

The trader scowled and gave his chair an irritated yank across the floor. There was no trace of his former boyish expression in the look he shot at the cheechako who had interrupted him.

"Well, upon my word, Tynan," he said, a scornful twist to his lips, "you make an exceptional hired man— especially when it comes to attending to the needs of this particular room. I'm sure Sasha will be sorry

to lose you." Something in his tone charged the atmosphere with tenseness.

Gary said nothing, though the line of his jaw grew set.

"By the way," Nick continued, reaching into his pocket for his cigarettes, "shall I reserve your passage for the down-trip of the *Starr*, Tynan?"

Gary placed the log on the fire to his satisfaction, taking longer than usual. Then he straightened, and while brushing his hands together he looked the trader up and down impersonally. "No thanks, old man," he spoke quietly. "I always attend strictly to my own business."

The two young men stood plumbing the depths of each other's eyes until Sasha stepped hurriedly in between them, slipping the yarn once more over Nick's hands.

"Come, Nicolai. You must finish the work you began," she interrupted, shoving him toward a chair.

Gary walked out of the room, while the trader looked after him, the yarn dangling unheeded from his arms.

"There's something about that fellow I don't like, Sasha!" he burst out. "I think Colonel Jeff was a bit too hasty in hiring him. I'm not knocking him, you understand, but I'm just thinking of your interest."

"Why, Gary has been splendid!" the girl defended quickly. "Alexander and Seenia just adore him, and all the rest of us like him, too."

"Yes?" He slipped one arm free of the yellow yarn, lighted a cigarette and turned to toss the burned match into the fire-place, thereby concealing the sudden flare of jealousy in his eyes. "You know he's a stranger in this part of the country. He landed here looking like

a tramp, from where no one knows. What his business has been is a mystery, too, but it wasn't manual labor, that's a cinch. He's got hands like a woman. In these days of fox-poaching, Sasha, you can't be too careful, that's all."

"He told me he'd been mining in Siberia, Nicolai, and he showed me a scar on his head he got there in a skirmish!"

"Huh! He was making a bid for sympathy."

"But he wasn't making a bid for sympathy when he jumped overboard to save Feodor, Nick! And he never asked to be left behind at Rezanoff, you must admit that!"

"Oh, well!" Nick tossed the yarn to a chair. "Have it your own way, then. No doubt the man's all right," he conceded. "Anyway, there's no use trying to tell you anything. You don't know any more about the ways of the world than a baby, Sasha. And you'll never learn anything, either, until you go Outside and see something of life. . . . Sasha—" he looked down into her face, heart-shaped, big-eyed in the dim afternoon light, desire struggling with the better judgment that at last plunged his hands into his pockets, lest they touch her. He could not afford to make another mistake such as that he had made on the Lookout. And yet he was in one of his moods when Sasha Larianoff appealed to him most. Sasha, so young and fresh with her bright hair making golden shadows on the cream of her neck. Sasha would be exquisite to love. Unsullied and fine with the delicate, subtle attractiveness of a nature attuned to beauty. He thought he never would tire of her, as he did of other women. Therefore he was going to marry her. He must be the first to

bring the radiant look of love to her face, the englamoured light to her eyes. He contrasted her enchanting, illusive little ways with those of other women he had known, worldly women of the States who had once intoxicated the young man from Alaska with their calculated emotion-arousing arts. But his thralldom had been brief. He learned quickly and because of a certain ruthless, dominant masculinity, he could go his way in love now with capable insolence. Many women liked his cave-man methods, but Sasha, to whom love was a closed book, was different. Sasha must be won—not taken. Yet, though he despised a quick surrender, he had no patience, nor time for a long wooing of the woman who should be his wife. And now another man had entered his domain. He had not realized that day of Feodor's accident in Rezanoff that the bearded Tynan was so young and good-looking. Otherwise he would have seen to it that Feodor's substitute now was Side-money.

"Sasha," he repeated. "You're such a darned, sweet, pugnacious little thing. You need someone to look after you. . . . Women like you were meant for love and protection—and not for business. Let me——"

"Now, now, Nicolai!" She held up a warning finger. "Not another word! Besides, I must run upstairs and see if Seenia has finished her nap. It's nearly supper time. If you like, you may help Zoya set the table, or you may play on the piano one of those jazzy tunes you like so well when you are in the United States." With a wave of her hand she disappeared in the shadows of the back hall.

Towards evening the rain ceased, and the wind began to die down, though the noise of the turbulent

sea outside the Island seeped into the living-room like sounds heard when a shell is pressed against the ear. After supper the Colonel was enjoying his smoke, making plans for the morrow, while Gary, seated on the floor, was coaxing Alexander to bring him his coat.

"Bring me my coat, Alex. Bring it here, boy. Bring me my coat!"

The fox nipped at the garment lying at the farther end of the room. Then he dropped it, looking up with his head at an inquiring angle, one foot raised.

"Come a-running! Right this way, Alex!" Gary patted his knee encouragingly. "Come a-running!" Once more the animal took hold of the coat, played with it a moment, and then dragged it, with many halts, along the floor until he dropped it by the side of the young man.

"Good old fellow!" Alexander placed both little forefeet on Gary's chest and muzzled an affectionate nose against his neck.

"You blessed old fraud!" He laughed, throwing his arm about the fox. "You know you'll get your reward, don't you?"

Alexander's yellow eyes watched intently as Gary lifted a browned leg of duck from its wrapping of paper napkin, and he was on the alert to catch it in his mouth when it was tossed to him.

"Great Mahogany Ghost!" roared the Colonel. "Wake up, Gary! I've been talking to you for the last five minutes and you haven't heard. Drat the fellow," he went on. "He's got the ranch like a side-show, with his performing foxes, and his trained sea-gulls, and such."

"What's the trouble, Colonel?"

"I said you ought to take the *Simmie and Ann* over to Rezanoff tomorrow for the mail. The *Starr* is due from the South today, but the storm has delayed her, probably."

"Oh, certainly, Colonel Jeff." Gary came to his feet and found a chair. "I'll have to stay there all night anyway, and have that crank-shaft attended to. The *Simmie's* engine is getting too temperamental."

"That will make it just right for Zoya," exclaimed Sasha. "She wants to go in to town to see her mother. Now she can stay over night, too."

Nick had been rather silent since supper. He sat outside the light of the lamp in the shadows on the piano stool, his long legs out in front of him, his elbow on the keyboard. His gaze shifted back and forth from Sasha, knitting a yellow scarf in the glow of the fire, to the newcomer. Only once did he look at Zoya. That was when the creole's visit to Rezanoff was mentioned.

Finally he turned to the instrument and sat in a preliminary mood of abstraction, his long, brown hands on the keys. When he began to play it was softly, meditatively, as if he would not disturb the conversation of the others. The color, contrast and rhythm were such as come only to those unfettered musical ones who play by ear. In his improvisation were hints of his days spent in civilization—days he clothed now in the glamour that time and distance lend. Through the medley wandered a plaintive theme from *Madam Butterfly*, weird muffled bits from *Peer Gynt*, a strain from one of Hope's *Indian Love Lyrics*.

Gradually as he created an atmosphere, the conversation back of him ceased. When all were listening he began to sing in a voice that was low, but vibrant and

masculine. The other men in the room knew, if Sasha did not, that Nicholas Nash was singing to her.

*"If all the world were a violin
And the four winds were the strings,
With love for a bow, I would make you know
What my heart sings.
The North would be loud, the East would be keen,
And the West like a passion driven;
But the sweet, warm South——"*

The words ceased, as if he had suddenly checked himself in a declaration of love. But he continued to play. Presently he drifted from a succession of chords, half-barbarian in their muted rhythm, into a saga of the North, a simple, chanting song of a white man setting forth in winter over the frozen whiteness of Bering Strait toward the magnetic radiance of the Northern Lights. A song of the Siberian coast and what the man found there—freedom among the lawless and forgetfulness of the world in the primitive, dangerous love of an Arctic queen. He made his listeners feel the restlessness of the wandering spirit, the contempt for safety, for comfort, the chafing at confining restrictions that started the adventurer on his way.

Sasha, who had ignored his first song, applauded the last one. She crossed the room to get something from the dining-table, and paused before the piano.

"Ah, Nicolai," she smiled at him. "That was splendid! You, who think you are civilized just because you have been so often to the States, you really love the North, Nick. It is the North that will claim you in the end."

Half an hour later Nicholas Nash and the girl sat before the dying fire alone. The others had gone to bed. Sasha had been talking of her foxes—the number she would sell in December. “I’ve been wonderfully successful, Nick, and I can pay you every cent I owe you,” she concluded.

“I’d rather you’d marry me, Sasha, and then you wouldn’t owe me a cent. It would all be in the family then, you see.”

“Now, Nick, let’s not talk of that again.”

“But I *must* talk of it! That’s all I can think of lately, and I want to get it settled——”

“It is settled, Nicolai.” The girl rose to her feet. “Please don’t mention it any more. Besides, it’s time to go to bed. I’ve still to make out a list of the things I want Gary to——”

“‘Gary! Gary!’” Nick mocked bitterly, jerking himself upright with a gesture of impatience. “That’s all I can hear from you now. It seems to me you have become rather chummy with the fellow to be calling him by his first name on such short notice. . . . Look here, Sasha! Let me leave you my man Side-money, to look out for things until Feodor gets around again. Let this cheechako go. He——”

At the look on the girl’s face he checked himself. “No,” she replied quietly but firmly, as she gathered up her knitting. “Your interest is appreciated, Nicolai, but I am capable of managing my own affairs.”

For one indeterminate moment Nick visibly struggled with himself as he looked down on Sasha. Then he swung sullenly on his heel and started for the back hall that led to the stairway.

“Very well. Have it your own way. Perhaps—the

time will come when you'll be glad to have me help you manage your affairs," he added ominously.

He paused, giving her an opportunity to retract her words. When she did not, he ascended the stairway slowly, stopping midway and looking back toward the living-room. Then he gave his head an angry shake and went on quickly to the top, where an uncurtained window framed a bit of the night. He stared with unseeing eyes at the inked-in tops of trees against a sky where flying clouds trailed themselves across the stars. The comfortable snoring of Colonel Jeff filled the quiet.

He turned down the hall where a night-lamp glowed faintly on its bracket, then slackened his footsteps. The door of Seenia's room was opening. Into the dim light stepped Zoya, in an ivory-tinted kimona, tall and slim and beautiful as a tawny queen. Her thick ebon hair, unbound, marked off the oval of her face and fell to her knees.

For a moment the two stood looking into each other's eyes. Then as the needle to the magnet Zoya walked toward Nash. Caution, indecision succeeded one another in his manner. But when she reached him he gathered her into his arms with reckless desire.

Neither of them knew that Gary Tynan, coming in from the float, stood watching at the head of the stairs for one astonished, spell-bound second, before he softly retraced his steps. Neither of them knew that he went out to the beach and walked there for an hour in the dark, before venturing back to the house to go to bed.

CHAPTER X

MORNING lifted out of the storm, flooding the world with sunshine that had in it an exhilarating hint of fall. The air was vitalizing with the clear, pure ozonic vigor of the North. Blackbirds rollicked in the tree-tops and cut joyous black lines against the sky. Seagulls soared and skirled and screeled in ecstasy. Foxes scampered along the sands, stopping now and then to hop, stiff-legged, about each other in sheer animal happiness.

Down at the float Gary responded, like the wild things, to the stimulus of the hour. As he made the *Simmie and Ann* ready for the short journey to Rezanoff he felt—and was fully aware of the delightful incongruity of the feeling—like a young Viking starting out on adventure when there was yet the lure of countries undiscovered. He was just beginning to realize that the greatest wonder of Alaska is the consciousness of youth that it brings to those who dwell there. Even the Colonel, he knew, was feeling it this morning, as he stepped jauntily along, Zoya's bag in one hand, his cane swinging in the other, and a spike of lupine stuck behind his ear.

He helped Zoya aboard with old-fashioned gallantry. As the launch shot away from the float and Gary gave

the whistle three playful toots, Colonel Jeff waved his cane in vigorous farewell.

The *Simmie and Ann* rounded Lookout Point and the prow dipped to a smooth ground-swell, leaving a purple wake across the oily silver of the sea. Gary thrust his head out of the wheel-house window to wave at Sasha, fluttering her handkerchief from the Lookout tower high above them. He was the happier for knowing that she had not waited down at the float while Nick and Side-money made ready the *Seal Pup* for departure.

An unmanageable strand of dark hair tumbled down over his eyes, and he shook it back as he stepped to the wheel again and gave it a turn.

“*‘Mo-o-r—or—ning w-a-i-t-s at the end of the w-o-r-l-d
And the w-o-r-l-d is all at our f-e-e-t!’*”

he caroled in a very bad tenor voice.

“How’s that for warbling, Zoya?” he called, with a grin that acknowledged his own vocal shortcomings.

The creole girl, standing in the bow of the boat, turned to him with a shy smile that might have meant anything. “Didn’t you ever hear of the *Gypsy Trail*?” he continued. “No? You look like a gypsy queen yourself, this morning, in that wine-colored shawl.”

He hummed a few more bars of the song:

“*‘Follow the Romany patteran
West to the Sinking Sun,
Till the junk-sails lift through the houseless drift
And the East and the West are one,’*”

he sang. "You know, Zoya, if we kept heading this way out along the Aleutian Islands it wouldn't be long before we'd arrive at the place where the East and the West are one—in point of longitude at least. Rather thrilling idea, that. Don't you think?"

The girl nodded her head and pointed westward. "Yes. Out along there," she volunteered, "the natives call them the Isles of the Sinking Sun."

Her vivid shawl stirred in the breeze. The sunshine falling on her bare head brought out the iridescent shades in her thick, black hair and lent a golden tinge to her skin. Gary's eyes rested on her in frank, impersonal delight. She was superb, this dusky beauty of the North! Yet there was about her also that hint of pathos which seems the heritage of those who are only half white. She stimulated his imagination to-day. Half-formed phrases came to him. Sentences from Seenia's tales began to group themselves about his thought of this girl. Half white! Idols of wood! Moonlight dances before the mouths of caves! The Mummy Cave of Oo-koon! *The Mask of Jade!*

He nearly shouted. For the first time in many sterile months, he felt in his mind the stir of literary creation. A story was germinating. He tried desperately to grasp it—to hold it—then groaned. It was gone. The precious thing had vanished in a flash, as it had come. Only the phrases remained, empty, meaningless. Yet—in a dim way he knew that the thing would come again. He felt sure of it.

He looked up at Zoya. She had turned facing the wheel-house, her hands holding her shawl under her chin; but her eager dark eyes were fixed on something astern.

In another instant Gary heard the *Seal Pup* slugging the cliffs with blasts from its unmuffled exhaust. The sounds grew louder and in a few minutes the *Pup* snorted alongside—shot by—went on ahead.

Almost immediately Gary swore. Nash, with the fastest launch on the coast, was doing that thing which maddens even the most phlegmatic boatman—doing it with insolent deliberateness.

He was running circles around the plodding little *Simmie and Ann*!

Gary went through all the stages of emotion from the first overwhelming helpless rage at the *Simmie's* lack of speed, with the attendant primitive urge to do battle with the owner of the *Pup*, to the last stage when a saving sense of humor came to temper the situation. When the *Seal Pup* was snorting derisively by for the third time, the cheechako was able to thrust his dark head out of the wheel-house window and achieve a casual wave of the hand as he gave Nash a good-natured, careless hail. The trader's interest in the one-sided sport ceased at once, and he headed for Rezanoff, quickly leaving the slower boat behind.

When the *Simmie and Ann* reached the village dock, the *Pup* was one of a dozen launches moored there.

It was steamer-day, the most important day of the month at Rezanoff, and there was an air of bustle and gaiety about the village. The flag swung lazily from the staff that topped the Governor's House. Men and women moved along paths that criss-crossed the knolls between dwellings. The dock near the trading-post was alive with natives, white men, creole girls and babies. There were yelpings of fighting dogs, the blare of phonographs, and the calls of launchmen. One

of the herring-scows had just disgorged a load of fish kept too long for salting, and as the silvery mass sank in the green depths below, hundreds of argus-eyed gulls came swooping to the spot, their hungry cries adding to the din.

Zoya left the launch and hurried home to her mother, while Gary made his way through the crowd to the post-office, which occupied one corner of Nash's store. The great, long room was filled with fishermen, townspeople and merchandise, and the light from the deep-silled windows was dimmed by articles of trade hanging near them. Mingled smells of fish, fruit, and vegetables were shot through by the penetrating odor of new overalls. Sacks of sugar and gunnies of flour lay piled up in the middle of the floor. A long counter held hardware, blankets and bundles of *beleek*—the dried salmon which natives and white men alike find invaluable on the trail. Before the single show-case, containing candy, cold-cream, perfume and other things for the feminine trade, stood a group of creole and Aleut girls from the herring-packing plant and the cannery near the village. They were dressed in their Sunday best, clean pinks, blues and yellows setting off their dark faces. When Gary entered, they laughed softly and nudged each other—their tribute to a young and good-looking white man.

As he dropped his mail in the slot, the crowd about the doorway began to move and Nicholas Nash pushed his way through. There was recklessness in the jaunty angle of his cap, and, as he came, he slapped this one and that one on the shoulder with hearty greetings. Gary marveled at the unusual geniality of the man until he saw a launchman nod wisely to his mate and heard :

"Nash has started to tank up again on *macoola*. I'll bet they rip the town wide open tonight, with Father Anton away."

Nick had gone to the back of the store and mounted a chair. His lean vivid face was flushed as it rose above the crowd. He removed his cap with an exaggerated flourish and held it aloft to catch the attention of the others.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" He spoke with a superb assumption of democracy. Only Gary, watching quietly on the outskirts of the crowd, caught the note of condescension in his voice, a note which told the observant listener that Nicholas Nash knew himself to be vastly superior to this *hoi polloi*.

"Ladies and gentlemen! They tell me that the roof blew off the dance-hall during the storm while I was gone, and so you can't have the usual boat-night dance this evening." He brought his cap down against his chest. "I just want to tell you, folks, that you needn't let that worry you one little bit. I'll turn my place over to you tonight, and you all can dance in the old ball-room of the Governor's House!"

He was interrupted by a scattered cheer, and yells of approval. The dance on every steamer-day was an event looked forward to by all Rezanoff and the surrounding country during the fishing season. The season was at its close. The *Starr* on her southward trip would take away what was left of the cannery crews. Nash's news was particularly welcome to those young men who had planned to have one last fling before leaving for the South. After the trader's announcement, business in the store increased two-fold. The two clerks behind the counter were kept busy

serving the girls with powder and perfume, and the men with shirts and ties.

Gary watched the activity for a few minutes, a good-natured light in his gray eyes. It was good to see a crowd again and listen to the comical gibes and slangy persiflage of the men.

When he went up to the hotel where he was to spend the night, he found Zoya in tears, trying to coax her unwilling mother into granting permission to attend the dance. Because the affair was to be at Nicholas Nash's house, the girl's parent objected. Gary was drawn into the argument by the weeping Zoya, and a few minutes later, to his utter astonishment, he found the girl winning the coveted permission by advancing him as an escort—and a guarantee of respectability. Going about his business during the day he gave some thought to the artifices of women.

The night was luminous with the radiance of stars as he and the creole girl set out down the wide, white road toward the house of Nicholas Nash. All about them the cool, friendly dusk was spangled with the home-lights on knolls and in the hollows. Voices called and answered; occasional strains of song sounded as couples strolled over the downs toward the orange rectangles that marked the windows of the Governor's House.

The Iron Catherine, as if remembering those nights of splendor and gaiety in her own Russian court, looked quizzically down from her pedestal on the gable roof at the knots of young men in the careless holiday garb of fishermen and cannery employees. They stood about on the green in front of the wide veranda, smoking, talking, practicing dance steps to their own humming.

From within came the murmur of voices and an occasional preparatory strumming of guitars, or the tinkle of a mandolin.

Gary left Zoya at the door of a small, temporary dressing-room, where young mothers were making determined and apparently ineffectual efforts to get their offspring to sleep before the dance began. He walked into the large, low-ceilinged room which had been the gathering-place of Russian officers and noblemen in Rezanoff's many-colored past.

On the natural wood of the old walls, now toned to deep amber, shiny new lamps of the cheap bracket variety had been hooked over nails hastily driven. Two Aleut boys were shaving candles, letting the wax fall on the floor as they walked about. At the head of the room sat the creole musicians, brown-faced, black-eyed and remarkably like Hawaiians in appearance. This resemblance was heightened by the instruments they held, for the Rezanoff orchestra was composed of two mandolins and three guitars.

Along two walls were ordinary wooden benches, now almost filled with girls and women in dresses rivaling the colors of the rainbow. The full-blooded Aleuts sat nearest the door, while the creoles occupied the benches nearer the musicians. It seemed almost as if Nick Nash's guests had consciously graded themselves according to color.

There was not a white woman in the house.

For a moment Gary was surprised at the pretty, modish gowns the creoles wore; then he remembered that feminine Rezanoff ordered its clothing through catalogues from New York's great mail-order houses.

Many of the girls were willowy creatures, with

creamy-tinted faces, languorous dark eyes, and crowns of black hair.

Gary looked up to see Zoya standing in the doorway of the dressing-room. Her dusky eyes glowed beneath the piled-up ebon softness of her hair. Her full mouth was scarlet against the tawny ivory of her face, and her bare neck and arms but added a deeper tone to the tea-rose color of the gown she wore—a simple, straight-hanging garment of fine wool. He smothered an exclamation of admiration and started over to her, just as the musicians began playing for the first dance.

Dodging between the couples, he collided violently with Nicholas Nash, bound for the same goal. There was a smoldering look in the trader's eyes and the aroma of *macoola* on his breath. This last, perhaps, accounted for the fact that here, among the khaki-clad fishermen, launchmen and cannery-employees, Nash appeared attired in a dinner jacket—the first that Reza-noff had ever seen. The black and white set off his lean blondness, and there was no doubt of the havoc he was creating in feminine hearts. The eyes of every woman present followed him admiringly, longingly.

As Gary started to lead Zoya away, Nash put out a proprietary hand and scowled.

"Isn't this our dance, Zoya?" he demanded arrogantly, and for an instant the twin devils of jealousy and distrust looked out of his eyes.

Assent was in Zoya's face, but Gary drew her firmly out on the floor.

"You're out of luck, Nash," he said, and though his voice was good-natured, the muscles about his jaw tensed slightly. "I brought her here tonight, you know." Cheechako though he was, he knew that Nash,

no matter what his private interest in Zoya might be, would never publicly compromise himself by escorting the half-breed to a dance.

But he surrendered the girl to the trader when the music stopped, and stood leaning against the wall near the doorway where the spectators congregated to watch and comment on the dancers.

The creoles' reputation for dancing was merited. They had a certain wild grace, a peculiar rhythm of movement that Gary had never seen before. And they attended strictly to the business of the moment. There were no conversations between couples. Men and women gave themselves up entirely to the sensation of motion. At first all the steps were modern ones brought direct from San Francisco and Seattle each summer by the younger cannerymen, but the creole musicians, playing by ear and instinct the syncopations learned from phonograph records, infused into the stringed music sensuous retardations and languorous variations of broken minors that made of the most familiar jazz selection something primordial, curiously stirring, intoxicating.

Nick Nash and Zoya danced together as if they had been made for one another, their blond and ebon heads close. Supple, slender, their bodies swayed and glided in perfect accord. Nash claimed the girl afterward for every alternate dance.

As Gary watched, the comments of the men about him began to penetrate his absorption. The attitude he found prevalent among the "summer sourdoughs," those men of the younger, flippant generation who came up from the States for the summer, was in marked contrast to the chivalry of the North, of which

so much has been written. They were glad, eager to take their fun with the pretty creole girls of the village, yet, like a thread of yellow through the fabric of their conversations, ran a contempt for the hapless children of mixed blood.

"But them little half-breeds look mighty purty to-night—purty as any white woman I ever see," defended an old-timer.

"Yah—but they get lummie-eyed like all the squaws when they get old," spoke up a wise, pimply-faced youth from Seattle.

"Yes, boys, and when the sweat begins to run, they all smell like fish." This last remark was the contribution of Nicholas Nash, as he passed through on his way to the kitchen.

A sudden overwhelming disgust for the men about him swept over Gary. He saw that Zoya was, for the moment, alone between dances, and he crossed over to her bench, determined to take her home to her mother, immediately.

"Wouldn't you like me to take you back to the hotel now, Zoya?" he suggested gently, endeavoring to be diplomatic.

"Oh, no! No, Garee!" The girl's eyes were sparkling with excitement and happiness. "I want to stay much, *much* longer!"

The young man looked helplessly about him. He was convinced that he should take Zoya away from the dance, still he could not force her to go with him. As a chaperon in Alaska he was absolutely uncertain of himself. He was debating as to his course of action when an Aleut boy came hurrying toward him.

Gary learned a moment later that some befuddled

fisherman, in making a landing with his launch at the dock, had cast off the line of the *Simmie and Ann*, and Sasha Larianoff's launch was drifting out on the tide. With a word of explanation to his charge, he turned and left the building, and a few minutes later was out in the fresh, star-lit dusk covering the distance to the dock as fast as his long legs could carry him.

On the heels of Gary's departure someone announced an old-fashioned Russian quadrille. The creole men, who had hitherto given up the floor to the whites, let out a whooping cheer and rushed for partners. The atmosphere of the place changed instantly. "To your places, now, boys and girls! One more couple! One more couple here!" the floor manager kept yelling. Those in sets already formed step-danced and shoved each other about playfully while waiting for the floor to fill up. At the command: "Let her go, Professor!" the music and the thump of feet struck up simultaneously, and the fun was on.

The creoles infused into their dancing some of the abandon which characterized those stirring and vociferous old-time orgies told of by the early traders along the Aleutians. Half-way through, many of the men jerked off their coats, tossing them to the benches, and began interposing their steps with astonishing side-shuffles, showing their white teeth in grotesque grimaces and delighted grins. Others, awaiting the word of the caller, stood in half-crouching positions, dancing from the waist up, with arms, torso and head. They all broke out every now and then into a short, chanting refrain, punctuated with whoops.

The interpolation of these savage bits from the for-

bidden dances of the past produced an instant emotional response in the women. Then the white men became infected with the spirit of the moment. The square dance ended in a thunder of applause, shouts of laughter and much perspiration.

Another quadrille followed, and another, while the yelling and chanting increased. Soon no one thought of dancing anything else. No one wanted anything else. The music became a series of monotonous, resonant chords, with a stirring rhythm, but no melody. An old Aleut woman shuffled in with a shallow native drum, and squatting beside the musicians in toothless glee, she drew out a hollow, thrilling boom with her fist. Nick produced a pair of castanets made of sea-parrot beaks and tossed them to a crippled boy, who added another primitive note to the thumping orchestra.

Soon it became whispered about that the trader was serving *macoola* in the kitchen, and the end of each dance was marked by an exodus. Though none of the girls drank the stuff, their spirits, stimulated by the dancing, kept pace with those of the men. Nick danced continually with Zoya and their daring interpretations won the frequent applause of the others.

To the sparkling-eyed creole this night was a social triumph. Never before had she been free to dance without being aware of the kindly, though supervising eye of Father Anton, or the sterner, more critical regard of her religious mother. She was intoxicated with her freedom, and the undivided attention of Nicholas Nash. Life for her tonight was at its flood.

In the midst of the revelry the trader bent his flushed face and whispered to her. She waited a moment, as if considering, then answered with a nod.

The next quadrille was forming with the usual shouting and laughter, when she slipped through a door that led into a hall, and ran rapidly up the stairs at the end of it.

Nash's living quarters were at the top. She knew he was still below with his guests. She opened the door cautiously and stepped into the large, warm, dusky room, where a faint odor of expensive cigarettes hung in the air. A clock ticked loudly as if protesting at her intrusion. She bumped into two wide, over-stuffed chairs before her eyes became accustomed to the shadowiness. Her slow-moving feet sank into the deep fur of bear rugs as she advanced. On a table a low-turned, shaded lamp shed a dim light over a medley of sporting and motor-boat magazines and smoking materials. Flames from the fireplace, quiet, fitful, made magic over the low couch before it, changing the rounded surfaces of velour cushions into soft, wild creatures that nuzzled and snuggled each other. The firelight wavered over the piano's pale, waiting keys; caught the metal on the rack of guns above it, and made high lights on the heavy tan velour curtains drawn over the windows. Beneath mounted heads of moose and mountain sheep a small gallery of pictures spotted the wall. They were all framed photographs of speed-boats and women.

Zoya reached timidly over and turned up the wick of the lamp, her dark eyes moving about the room wonderingly, lovingly. With a sudden catch of the breath, she pressed one hand against her throat; then her face took on an expression that had in it a touch of superstitious fear, a hint of remorse. She was looking up at the golden icon of St. Nicholas—a gift symbolic of a

Russian mother's faith in the protecting power of her son's name-saint.

The girl, trained in the household of a priest, walked slowly to the corner, and stood for a moment studying the kindly painted face, the upraised, cautionary hand. Then a shake of her head gave a negative answer to the mute pleading she saw there. She stepped back, caught up a scarf from the back of a chair, and mounting a stool, carefully covered the eyes of the holy picture.

CHAPTER XI

ZOYA was putting the final touch to the scarf over the icon when the door opened and Nicholas Nash's amused laugh sounded behind her. Startled, she turned, holding out her hands to balance herself as she looked down into his face. Before she could say a word he had caught her about the knees and with rough playfulness had set her down among the cushions of the couch.

"There, my little savage!" He laughed again. "You let that saintly old boy alone—d'you hear?" He straightened, balancing himself on widespread feet. "You let him alone, Zoya, and attend strictly to *this* little Saint Nicholas!" He tapped himself on the chest with an alcoholic air of vast importance.

Even in the compelling presence of her lover, Zoya paid the teachings of Father Anton tribute in the fleeting look she gave the covered icon. But, though she sighed as she turned from it, a second later, when she rose from the couch, the face she lifted to Nash was smiling, radiant.

"You make me for-get ever-ry thing, Nicolai!" Her quaintly accented English came slowly as she shook her dark head. "Always—you make me for-get ever-ry thing but you." She raised her slim, brown hands until they rested one on either side of his blond head.

"You are so beau-ti-ful, Nicolai." There was awe in her voice. For a moment she loved as children love. Her fingers slipped downward, following the contour of his shoulders, his arms. "So beau-ti-ful—so white, in these black clothes from the United States!" She took his hand and kissed it, then laid her cheek against it. "Nicolai," she said, softly, coaxingly, as if she had asked the question many times before; "when are you going to take me to see those great cities of the South? When are you going to—marry me?"

Nick's mood changed instantly. He stiffened and shoved her away from him. "Now, look here, Zoya—" His mouth and eyes were tensed with irritation, and his tone petulant, "—Look here, I *told* you not to talk about that any more, didn't I? I told you I'd changed my mind about that. . . . *Didn't I?*" A frown drew his light, finely drawn eyebrows together.

The creole shrank back a step. Then, with a quick movement she reached over and caught him by the shoulders. Troubled, frightened, she sought to compel his shifting eyes. Her chin quivered. "But . . . in the beginning—" she whispered. "In the beginning—Oh, Nicolai, you said——"

He shrugged and turned his face from her. "In the beginning—Oh, damn it! You women are always going back to the beginning! Well—I suppose I did say some fool things, but—what the devil—A man can't always think the same thing. You know that, Zoya. . . . Come—be reasonable now. . . . Zoya, look here—" as the girl's arms fell from him and her head sank dispiritedly. "Aw-w, look here, honey. Don't begin to cry now. I've told you how it is. A man in my position——"

"Is it Sasha, Nicolai? It is Sasha that you love better than me?"

"Sasha! Good Lord!" The irritation came back into his voice. "How often must I tell you to leave Sasha out of this entirely. I refuse to discuss Sasha with *you*. She—she regards me as so much driftwood, anyway, since that—that mealy-mouthed cheechako came. And look here, Zoya—" Blusteringly he seized upon this point to divert her from the other subject and put her on the defensive. "What do you mean by letting that fellow bring you here tonight, huh? What's he always butting in on my affairs for? I——"

He checked himself when he saw the girl was not listening. She stood quietly, but it was the ominous, pregnant quiet of the Indian. Her eyes were fixed on the framed photographs of women smiling from the wall near her.

"If you don't love Sasha, then it is one of *those* white women you love!" Her pointing finger trembled.

Nick's short, sardonic laugh sounded as he realized that she did not recognize the famous beauties of the screen whose pictures had once captivated his fancy.

"Perhaps—I do. And—perhaps I don't," he answered equivocally, turning to take a bottle from the mantel.

With an elaborate gesture born of his preceding potations he poured himself a drink and held the glass up so that the light shone through the pale liquor. He tipped backward and forward on his heels and in derisive dumb show toasted the pictured women before he drank. Then he pressed his handkerchief against his lips with a flourish, and with exaggerated carefulness, placed the glass back over the neck of the bottle.

"Perhaps I do—and then again—perhaps I don't," he repeated badgeringly.

At the taunt in his tones Zoya's gentleness slipped from her. Her body grew tense, like that of an animal before it springs; and like an animal she made a sinuous, swift movement that covered the space between herself and the wall. She lifted one of the photographs from its place and held it up even with her face.

"Look at us! Look at us, Nicolai!" she challenged, her head held high. "Am I not more beau-ti-ful than this one? Tell me, am I not more beau-ti-ful? Ah, yes, you know it is so! This, then, for your woman of the South!" With a crash of splintering glass she smashed the picture across the edge of the table, and with incredible swiftness snatched another from the wall. Before the trader's arms closed about her she had broken three.

"You—you damned little savage!" He swung her off her feet and bore her struggling, toward the couch. "You—You she-wolf!" The contact of his foot with the bear rug before the hearth threw him momentarily out of balance. At the same instant the girl made a violent effort to free herself.

Instead of trying to hold her, Nick surprisingly let her slip to the floor. Before she could recover he was kneeling beside her holding her down with both hands. He laughed at her spasmodic attempts to rise. "You little she-wolf!" he repeated admiringly. "You'd smash all my pretty ladies, would you! By God, I didn't think any of you half-breeds had that much fight in you!" There was a new interest in his look and a distinct tone of pleasure in his voice. He had reached that self-re-

vealing stage of intoxication where he wanted to tell the truth about himself.

"You know, Zoya, you native women ought to learn this—it's pursuit a man enjoys—Now, now, lie still there, honey! Lie still, and I'll tell you something. It's pursuit that makes a woman desirable, not surrender. Damn those who surrender! You half-breeds are too easy, Zoya—now, now, there you go fighting me again. . . . Wait. W-a-i-t a minute. I won't hurt you, Zoya, if you lie still. Darn it, I want to talk to you—have a conversation with you, don't you understand? I want to *tell* you things for your own good!" He tightened his grip on her wrists as the girl struggled silently, fiercely, like a fox that feels the tongs of the killer about its throat. He laughed. When he stopped, the clock seemed to burst into louder ticking for a few minutes.

"Take me, now, for instance," Nick went on. "I've always wanted what I couldn't have. I always want what I can't get. . . . Isn't that hell, now, Zoya? Yes. . . . I've always been like that. If you'd only known that in the beginning, eh?—you poor little devil." There was pity in his voice as he looked down into her flushed face, her flashing eyes, and the dark hair that had come loose from its confining pins and lay on the black fur of the rug. As the wind ruffles the bay into varying shades, so the alcohol colored his moods with quick changes. He regarded her for a long, contemplative moment.

"You are a handsome savage, Zoya. Damned if you're not, with your hair all down that way like a wild woman," he admitted with appreciation. "I like you best that way. This half-educated business never did

appeal to me. I want one thing or the other—Ah-h, now honey, don't keep on fighting me like this. . . . You didn't come up here to fight with me, did you? You came up here to tell me something, didn't you?" With his softening mood his voice sank to a caressing lowness. He lowered his face to hers. "Come, now, Zoya . . . sweetheart . . . you like me a *little* bit—don't you?" he murmured close to her ear as he snuggled his face in her hair. "Just—a—l-i-t-t-l-e, l-i-t-t-l-e bit. . . ." The words ended with his lips against her throat.

The girl gradually ceased struggling. With a sigh, she allowed her arms to relax, and lay still, though unresponsive. Nick raised her, not ungently, to a sitting position. "That's a good girl," he said, patting her knee approvingly.

With a weary gesture she brushed the hair back from her face and the two sat for a moment looking into one another's eyes, she with the knowledge that she had given her soul to this careless white man who regarded her as a creature of the moment; he with the certainty that his treachery would eventually break her heart.

"Darn it, Zoya, I *will* be decent to you tonight." A sort of poetic pity forced the words from him. From his kneeling position on the floor he reached to the couch back of him and dragged down some cushions. "I'll just show you how nice I can be when I want to." He placed the cushions at her back and made her comfortable. "We'll sit here a little while before the fire, and then—we'll go right down stairs again—won't we?"

There was adoration in Zoya's eyes now. He, the

king, had condescended to make her comfortable. She caught his hand and held it against her breast. "Oh, Nicolai, why don't you be always so good to me!" she exclaimed, a break in her voice. She settled herself gratefully in the circle of his arm, utterly forgetful of everything in the world except his physical nearness.

The man sat for a short time without speaking, while the alcohol brought out another psychological quirk of his nature. His enigmatic eyes were fixed on the flames as if he were visualizing something that came often to his mind. He took up a handful of the creole's dark loosened hair, winding and unwinding it about his hand. "Zoya," he said at last, "sitting here with you like this makes me think of something." The Alaskan was speaking in him now. "This is the moon of Kancha-oon, you know. September, when the first frost touches the hills and the short grass begins to turn. . . .

"I like this month in Alaska better than any other of the year. I like to think tonight that you and I are out in the hills in a lodge by a mountain lake I know. We both are Indians, Zoya, squatting on a bear pelt before our fire. We are sun-browned, simple, uneducated, contented. Our winter supply of salmon, which you and I have caught and smoked, is stored here in our lodge. We can smell it, and the tang of smoked hides. We are very comfortable, very warm, for our walls are covered with skins—bear, moose, wol-verine, because I go out and hunt in the hills with the others of our tribe. I keep my squaw and my children in food and clothing. There's something satisfying in that, Zoya." He straightened his shoulders and lifted his chin. It was not hard to visualize him as he pic-

tured himself, a hunter tall, slim, clean as a blade. "I am strong. I am swift of foot. I like to take my chance against the things of the forest. I am the strongest man in my tribe." Unconsciously his voice had taken on the timbre of an Indian chant. In that moment, though neither of them knew it, he was near kin to the half-breed girl. "And you, Zoya, you like to prepare the meat and the hides for winter when I bring home my kill. We are dressed in the tanned skins of moose and caribou. You have trimmed them with bright colored beads. Our moccasins are soft, and when we walk we feel the earth close against our feet."

"Oh, tell me more, Nicolai!" she entreated, when he paused. "Tell me more!"

"We are happy, Zoya, because we know nothing of the ways of white men. And soon we shall go down the river to the village on the sea-coast. Go down in great canoes with others of our tribe, to the feast of Thanksgiving to the Spirit of Plenty, for fishing and hunting has been good. We shall dress with the splendor of savages, beads, headdresses, blankets of crimson and blue; and we shall dance, Zoya, to the sound of drums, and sing and feast and love, free as the Indian is free before he knows the ways of the South. Zoya—" he tightened his arm about her—"Zoya, I want to live like that." For the moment he was sincere. "When I think of you and me that way, Zoya, by God, I'd rather have you than any other woman in the world! . . . I'd be true to you then—if we both were natives."

The creole missed the subtle insult of this—the more insulting because it was unconscious.

"But Nicolai, I love you best as a white man—a

great white man!" Zoya drew away so that she might look admiringly into his face, flushed now with his own *macoola*-prompted eloquence. "I don't want to be an Indian. I want to be white—all white like you." She gazed into his eyes as if she thought he could grant her the wonderful boon of white blood.

There was a pause. Because of an opened door below, the throb of drums and guitars came up, primitive as the rhythm of the dance he had just pictured.

"No, no, Zoya!" Nash's mood had changed again, and his laugh was the indulgent, superior laugh of the white man. "I'd rather keep you savage, with your hair down like this—" He moved and wound a long strand about his neck, pulling it to bring the girl's cheek against his own. "Remember, honey, how I used to pull your braids when you were little?" He chuckled reminiscently. "Sometimes, even now,—I don't know why it is—but I want to drag you about by your hair—to hurt you." He tugged again at her hair, experimentally. "I'm a cruel brute, Zoya. Not all the time—but just sometimes." His voice was growing thicker. "I'm cruel as hell, Zoya. . . . You should never have anything to do with me—never." And he kissed her on the lobe of her ear while he slipped his hand caressingly over her bare arm to the elbow.

The girl trembled, by sheer will keeping herself from responding. In the silence the muffled sound of the drum came up from below, ceaseless, provocative, alluring in its monotonous beat.

Nash stirred uneasily.

"I guess we'd better go down now, Zoya."

But neither of them made a move to rise.

The loud ticking of the clock told off the seconds as they looked into each other's eyes—seconds suddenly grown precious, strangely electric.

"Zoya . . . Zoya . . ." he murmured, his hot face seeking hers through the tangle of her hair.

The faint throb of the drum stole again into the room, while he kissed her throat gently, lingeringly—kissed it until he reached her mouth. Then she turned to him with a passionate gesture of surrender.

"Oh, Nicolai," she whispered. "Always—always you make me for-get ever-ry thing . . . ever-ry thing in the world . . . but you . . ."

In the room below fishermen were shouting. Feet made still heavier by *macoola* were thudding festively to thumping chords, and the dances were growing wilder and more individual. Side-money, Nash's helper on the fox-ranch of Oo-koon, finally dragged his Aleut partner into a corner and began a solo performance, the steps of which were plainly dictated by his potations. When the girl failed to follow him, he shook her drunkenly, attempting to show her by example wherein she had failed. She stood aside in pigeon-toed meekness to watch him. Something in this docile attitude irritated the man, for he suddenly executed a wild, leg-flinging shuffle, and made a grab for the girl's long black braid. He proceeded to whirl her about by it like a sack on the end of a rope. Her yelps of distress started an avalanche of assistance her way, and in another moment Side-money was submerged in a mass of heaving, struggling, shouting humanity, while spectators on the side lines cheered and yelled unreasonably but with enthusiasm.

This mêlée was at its height when Gary Tynan, returning after a profane hour and a half struggle with a refractory engine of the *Simmie and Ann*, stepped up on the veranda of the Governor's House. Hot, sweaty, besmudged with oil, he stood a moment in the doorway looking about for Zoya. Then hastily he approached the "free-for-all" in the corner. He was in a mood to welcome a plunge into the combat, had it been necessary, but a glance convinced him that his charge was not there.

He turned and saw Zoya just entering the side door. She stood alone, one hand behind her on the knob.

With an exclamation in which relief and irritated responsibility were equally mingled, he crossed over to her. His trouble with the gas engine had awakened his slumbering resentment at being drawn into what he scornfully termed chaperoning Zoya.

"I'm sorry for leaving you alone so long, Zoya." His tone was pleasant by conscious effort. "But that darned engine—" He checked himself. "Get your wraps. I'll take you home now." There was a ring in his voice no woman would have thought of disobeying.

Before the girl could answer the door behind her opened and Nicholas Nash came into the room. It was obvious, from the glazed look in his eyes and the aroma of *macoola* about him, that he had stopped in the kitchen on his way downstairs for several more drinks of the fiery brew.

"Wha's the row?" he demanded thickly of Gary, as if that young man were responsible for the agitation in the corner.

"Search me!" Gary replied shortly. "I just came in

myself." He turned to the creole girl and added: "Ready, Zoya?"

She made an obedient step forward.

"Where d'you think you're goin'?" ejaculated Nash belligerently. "I-I've got a-a danze wi' you, Z-Zoya."

"Look here, Nash," Gary attempted to reason with the man. "This girl can't stay here any longer. Why, half that bunch is drunk already!"

"S-s-sure they are," admitted the trader, taking Zoya's arm. "I'm drunk m'self—gettin' drunker ever' minute, too. . . . Come—Z-Zoya. You like me whether 'm drunk or shober, don' you?" He started to place a fumbling arm about her.

Zoya's timid answer was lost in an explosive yell from the corner. Gary's jaw grew rigid and his gray eyes took on a steely glint. He jerked Nash's hand from the girl's arm. "Get your wraps, Zoya. I'll meet you on the veranda," he said tersely.

He hooked his other arm through that of the trader and swung open the side door. Before Nash could recover he shoved him into the quiet hall and shut out the sound of the *mêlée*.

"I'm not trying to intrude on your affairs, Nash, nor do I want to dictate to you, but I'm responsible for Zoya tonight," Gary said firmly. "I promised Sasha and the girl's mother I'd look after her. I'd have taken her home long ago, if I hadn't been kept out on the bay with that damned engine. *That's* no place for her." He jerked his thumb backward indicating the room where the yelling had taken on renewed vigor.

The trader teetered uncertainly on his heels, standing with both thumbs under the armholes of his waistcoat.

He surveyed the cheechako with intense and drunken concentration.

"Shay—" he hiccupped as he made a futile effort to snap his fingers at Gary. "Who d'you think you are—anyway—comin' round tryin' t'run my women? Takes shum one s-s-marter 'n a cheechako to get ahead of Nick Nas-Nas-Nash! I've been lookin' out for Zoya m'self for lasht hour." He drew his chin in and straightened importantly. "Too bad you weren't here to chap-chaperon us. And as for S-Sasha—I'm c-c-apable lookin' out for her, too; an' wha's more—I intend to. An' look here, Tynan. I'm gettin' tired of havin' you spyin' round here—d'you hear. I——"

"Confound it, Nash! Shut up. You're becoming a nuisance. You're so full of *macoola* you smell to high heaven. If you take my advice you'll go to bed and sleep it off before you start talking. You're not responsible." Gary brushed contemptuously by and made his way out to the veranda, where he took Zoya's arm with little ceremony, and steered her down the steps.

Nash was in that befuddled condition where he was physically unable to fight, but striking through the numbness that was swiftly overcoming him came the thought that he had been accused of drunkenness—supreme insult to the intoxicated. He must resent this aspersion. He began to run unsteadily and came abreast of his departing guests just as they were passing the cannon.

"Look—here, you damned cheechako," he mumbled, lurching against Gary. "You come back here 'till I s-s-ettle this wi' you—you——"

Gary, white-faced and tight-lipped, turned swiftly and grasped the trader by the shoulders. "Zoya, get on

ahead there. Then wait for me. Now then—" he brought his attention back to the struggling Nash, and shook him. "You're in no condition to fight, you fool! . . . Oh, you still want it do you? Well—" The two men swayed together. There was a quick movement of Gary's leg as it tangled with the trader's, and then Nash was sitting flat on the grass alongside the old cannon, staring stupidly at his own two feet straight out in front of him. The moonlight fell on his sleek blond head and the mussed bosom of his finely plaited white shirt. His body wavered and his chin sank little by little. It rested at last on his chest, and one arm came up uncertainly and twined itself about the cold muzzle of the sturdy little cannon.

Gary, surveying him, felt the storm in his mind suddenly clearing away. It was with a distinct effort that he controlled a desire to laugh as he walked briskly down the flagged path to overtake the creole girl.

A few minutes later the trader stirred, raised his head, and looked about him dazed. He was alone outside his house. The sounds of combat inside had ceased. Once more the music came thumping out into the cool, dim night. The roof of the Governor's House was a silhouette against an indigo, star-pierced sky, and the bust of Catherine stood out dark and strong. Nick's wandering eye focused on the Iron Empress. Already the happenings of the last quarter of an hour had vanished from his befuddled mind. He hiccoughed twice very solemnly, placing one hand nicely over his mouth. "B-e-g—par-don," he said with elaborate politeness. His arm tightened about the cannon as about the neck of a dear friend. The other hand came up waveringly and remained poised for the im-

pressive salute to the royal Catherine that was struggling to come forth from the alcoholic mazes of his brain. He hiccoughed again.

"G' night, Kate—ol' girl! G' night!" he murmured.

And with a snuggling, childish movement he laid his cheek against the rust-pitted cannon of Baranoff and sank into untroubled slumber.

CHAPTER XII

THE Governor's House fell behind Gary as his long strides covered the stretch of dim, white road between himself and Zoya. When he reached her side, she turned quickly, halting him by placing a hand on either of his arms.

"Garee—" She hesitated, with a timid glance back at the lighted windows of the house. He did not speak for a moment as he looked into her face, white in the moonlight, her great dark eyes nearly level with his own. "Garee— We will not say to Sasha or to my mother how the unpleasant ending came to the party, will we?"

He realized with sudden pity, that Zoya was trying to protect the trader from the consequences that might attach to him should his activities as host become known in her family. His contempt for the man vanished in his compassion for the girl.

"No." His voice was gentle when he answered her. "No, Zoya, of course not." And they walked in silence to the hotel.

He bade her good night and climbed the creaking stairway to his room. Though it was late and he was very weary, sleep refused to come. He lay staring at a spot of moonlight on a peeled log rafter, while impressions of the last two days flooded upon him. He saw

Nash as the trader had been yesterday on Rocking Moon standing before the fireplace holding Sasha Larianoff's hand, when he, Gary, had brought in the firelog; Nash at the piano a few hours later, singing love songs to the girl; and finally Nash upstairs in the dimly lighted hall of the ranch-house, with the half-breed Zoya in his arms.

He turned his restless dark head on the pillow, impatiently telling himself that all this was none of his business. He was merely a bird of passage in a little out-of-the-way Alaskan village, he reminded himself, rather bleakly; here today, gone tomorrow. Yet, he could not get away from his thoughts. He guessed that the trader had been making love to Zoya for some time. That neither Sasha nor the Colonel suspected this seemed incredible. Still, both girls had known Nash all their lives. He stood almost in the place of a brother to Sasha, for the tie of friendship between families is very strong in the thinly populated North. Zoya, of the meek Aleut blood, was as completely dominated by the arrogant white man as her fore-mothers had been by the Russians. Sasha, affectionate, loyal and judging others by herself, would hardly look for treachery in her own family; and the Colonel, though alive to Nash's weakness where other women were concerned, was one of that old-time chivalrous type, who considered the women of his own household utterly protected from the selfishness and lusts of men, merely because they were of his household. That Nash would take advantage of Zoya would be to the old Colonel a monstrous and unthinkable thing. Meanwhile the trader, like many another white man in Alaska, was sowing the seeds of tragedy. Gary wondered how it

all would end. For the time being he was puzzled over the psychological make-up of a man who could make love to both mistress and maid at the same time. He had yet to learn how little the half-breed counts with the white man in the game of life and love.

Though he kept on trying to convince himself that all this was no concern of his, he found himself fervently hoping that Father Anton would return before he took passage south on the *Starr*. The affair between Nash and Zoya could not have progressed if the priest had been home, of that Gary was positive. Sasha, too, needed some one on whom she could depend. Misfortune had set her feminine little shoulder to the wheel of business, but underneath her show of independence and efficiency, he felt there was in her an unsuspected desire to lean on some one stronger than herself. While he admired the valiant nature of his small employer, it was this very quality in her which aroused him to a secret protective tenderness.

When tardy sleep finally overtook him, he was wishing that his might be the strength on which Sasha Larianoff would depend, and his last waking thought was that he did not want to take passage south—just yet.

This desire crystallized into a decision the next day when he returned to Rocking Moon with the mail. Sasha, a shadow of disappointment in her eyes, read aloud paragraphs from the letters she had received from her father. His return was again delayed until the middle of November.

When the girl finished reading she sat silent a long time, her head bent, her eyes on the flames leaping up the black throat of the chimney. Gary thought she

looked very little, and somehow forlorn, as he watched the flickering glow pencil her profile and touch in lustres of gold on the bronze curls massed at the back of her head. The amber light played on the exquisite curve beneath her small chin in a way that set him wondering what it would be like to cup his hand under that rounded softness.

It was that evening that he decided to stay on Rocking Moon until Father Anton's return.

He said nothing of this until a few days later, when he and Sasha, followed by the ever-faithful Alexander, were tramping across the Island toward a point on the northwest coast, where the girl wanted to investigate a fox burrow. It was a sunless autumn afternoon and they came out of the cool, aromatic freshness of the forest into a narrow tundra-meadow along the edge of the cliffs, where some gnarled and wind-stunted trees were etched in writhing attitudes against the gray space beyond. The tundra was soft and spongy beneath their feet and ivory-white with little balls of Alaska cotton, sticking up like so many tiny floss dusters on the ends of their six inch stems.

Gary led the way to a fallen tree and the two, with the fox between them, sat down, facing the ocean. About them the smell of dying grass and browning leaves filled the air with the shadowy sadness of vanished summer. The sea was quiet and olive-tinted. It rose and fell in long, slow swells about three fang-like rocks where shags sat in black and silent brooding.

Sasha put an arm over Alexander's back, as he sat on his haunches, and leaning her bare head against him, looked dreamily down.

"I love to watch the sea—it's so changeable—so

alluring." She broke the stillness, then paused as a shag on the rock below extended its wings in a weird, stationary pose of flying. A moment later it flapped away across the water, long neck out-thrust toward a distant fog-bank that shut out the rest of the world. Even as they looked the sea grew gray and wan beneath the advancing mist.

"This sort of a day—all lavender and gray—makes me think of the time when I shall be growing old." Her faintly husky voice had taken on a musing undertone. "Old age must be something like the fog. We see it creeping on . . . very quietly, graying the bright colors of youth—cooling the hot blood of desire. Before it reaches us we feel a curious dread of it—of its inevitability, a deadening sense of loss—" she was hesitating as though she sought in spirit to span the years she had not as yet known. "Then—finally when it is upon us, as the fog is on us now, we look about to find a peace, a remoteness from the strife and annoyance of living that makes us as serene as—" she broke her musing with a little laugh—"as Seenia dreaming in the firelight after dinner." She turned suddenly, smiling at Gary with her eyes. "What do you think of that idea? Do you, too, think that all the mean and little things, all the trials and sorrows will be softened and veiled for us when we are old, as those clawing, ugly arms of the trees are dimmed now by the fog? Isn't that possible?" Across Alexander's mauve fur her clear amber eyes questioned him.

To Gary it was incongruous that she, radiant with health and youth, should be thinking of age. He could not imagine her ever being any older. Manlike, he did not want to think of her being any older—but always

like this with her bare, bright head backed by the silver fog. The quiet and mystery of it was pressing in on all sides, enclosing them in a lessening world, creating a strange new feeling of intimacy. From the tundra came a damp earthy odor which awakened in him a sense of unity with the wilderness, which, shared, in this manner, became another bond between himself and this girl of the North. He wanted to reach over and take the hand that lay on Alexander's neck—a small, firm hand with fingers tapering to pink nails with little moons at the base.

Instead he discreetly stroked Alex's silky back.

"It may be that age comes on us that way," he said, "but—I can't associate *you* with it, Sasha. Besides, in your country no one grows old. Look at the Colonel at sixty—he's still a mere stripling. But the fog . . ." He looked around at the silver obscurity that hemmed them in. "Once, when I was a little boy, I read something that has influenced my thoughts of the fog; a bit of verse called *The Fog-Maiden*:

*"In from the sea, born of mystery
Swift as a gull she flies:
And oh, the snare of her wind-tossed hair,
And the lure of her gray-green eyes!"*

he quoted. "Now, what do you think of *that* idea?" he repeated her question.

She had been listening rapt, shining-eyed, with an interest that was deeper than that called forth by his words.

"Oh!" she exclaimed bringing her hands together, "I was afraid for a moment that you were going to tell me I was childish, as Nicolai always does when

I speak my thoughts." She smiled at him. "I like so much to exchange ideas!" In her earnestness she edged toward him, causing Alexander to shift his position with an air of intense boredom. "Dad says one reason the Larianoffs make such happy marriages, is because they remember that, after all, matrimony is seventy-five per cent conversation—not that we are concerned with that, Gary," she interposed in a matter-of-fact fashion, "but I do like to sit down with a friend and say: 'Now, I think thus and so about this subject—' " she put her head on one side and tapped one palm with the finger of her other hand,—“ ‘you tell me what *you* think.’ And then, Gary, I want him to give me his ideas, you know, just as men talk to each other. Someway I always imagine people's minds are like jewel-boxes—full of all kinds of sparkly things if I could only find the key to them. But," she hesitated—"but it's so hard to make men talk of anything outside of—of personal matters."

Gary could understand why a man might rather talk of personal matters when sitting tête-à-tête with Sasha Larianoff, but he did not tell her so.

A lone crane, lost in the fog, flapped by over their heads and the girl laid a quieting arm across the fox and drew him against her. "But you are different," she continued. "Yes, you are quite different from any of the men I have known up here." She rested her chin on Alexander's head and looked at Gary with frank, thoughtful eyes. "I shall miss you when you go South."

In view of his decision, which he had not yet mentioned, her certainty that he was going away disconcerted him for a moment.

"But I don't want to go just yet," he declared with unintentional warmth. "I'd like to stay here until—anyway, until your father returns. That is if you want me," he amended hastily. "But—if my services as 'hired man' are not required,—" his teeth flashed white in a smile and his gray eyes looked light and laughing in the tan of his face as he made a quick, dismissing gesture—"I've decided to take a cabin over in Rezanoff and—well, just stay around a bit—to look things over, you know."

"I'm glad," she said simply. Then, giving Alexander a squeeze she rubbed her cheek against his ear. "We're both glad, aren't we, Alexander Baranoff, that he's going to stay," she added playfully. "And of course, Mr. Gary Tynan, you'll continue being the 'hired man' on Rocking Moon, if you want to be."

And thus it happened that the *Starr* on her southward trip, went without him. The day following its departure Gary returned from the other side of the Island to find that Nicholas Nash had paid Sasha a hasty visit and was already gone on to the Island of Oo-koon. Gary smiled to himself when he heard this. Instinctively he knew that the trader had come to investigate his continued residence on Rocking Moon.

It was shortly after this that Gary's work on the ranch was doubled. Colonel Jeff with his customary inefficiency, was helping on the *Simmie and Ann* when he fell overboard. His ducking brought on a severe attack of rheumatism. His lamentations as he sat confined to his chair by the fireplace, were punctuated with vigorous and profane aspersions aimed at the absent Feodor, who, the old fellow had convinced himself was in some occult way responsible for this

recurrence of his malady. Feodor was expected back to the Island as soon as he returned from a neighboring village where he had gone to visit relatives while Nature put the finishing healing touches on his arm.

Gary had never felt more physically fit than now, and in addition hope was growing slowly within him. He felt stirrings of his lost literary sense. Almost daily the plot-germ of the story which lay at the back of his mind tantalized him with flashes of life. And, too, the spell of the Northern autumn wove itself into the vague subconscious process—the spell of glamorous October days that turned the grass on the rolling, treeless hills to amber and cardinal and brown, showing them clear and vivid in the crisp air of the frosty mornings, veiling them with silver in the afternoon fog that drifted down from Bering Sea, touching them with shadow and mystery at night under the first pale flushes of the Northern Lights. It was not alone the outward beauty that moved him. It was that illusive, intangible, exquisite thing that sent his mind questing behind and beyond what his eyes visioned. He felt the spirit of something new and clean and vigorous manifesting, and he wanted to understand it, to make it his own, so that he might give it out again in his work to the crowded, plodding world of civilization.

This quest of Gary's drew him into many a chat with Seenia. He was pleased and not a little flattered that the old Aleut's deep-set eyes always rested on him affectionately. As he sat on a footstool close to her chair listening to her tales of those days before she was a Christian, she often stopped in her recitals to smile at his interest and pat him on the shoulder.

From her he learned much of the topography of Oo-koon, the Great Cave, the landing place where the whalers used to go for the December ceremonies beneath the swinging mummies. She took a childlike pride in telling him of her Christian duties too, when she had been the keeper of the light on Father Paul's tomb, and once, when they sat alone in the living-room, he learned more of the eyeless Mask of Jade and her pathetic efforts to win the secret of its hiding-place from the spirits, and from the God of Father Anton. Poor, half-civilized Seenia, bargaining with her deities! Her soul was a battle-ground where prayer and incantation kept up continual strife!

One foggy afternoon Sasha walked with Gary to the nearest feeding-station. The mist, laden with the odors of forest and sea, was cool and damp in their faces. They swung along the hard sand unable to see more than fifty feet ahead of them. Sasha, cupping her hands about her mouth, talked "fox" to the invisible animals she knew to be near.

Answering yelps came from behind ghostly tree-trunks above the beach grass, and she laughed delightedly. "Listen to the barkative little rascals!" Again Gary experienced that feeling of unreality that came so often to him on Rocking Moon—the sensation of participating in some Oriental fairy-tale where enchanted foxes revealed the secrets of the woods to a bronze-haired girl.

He paused, letting the buckets of food hang unsupported from the wooden yoke across his shoulders, and grinned at her with the camaraderie which came so easily to them both lately. "Just listen to what they tell *me*!" he boasted, and sent out a fox call he

had been practising. But the moment that followed brought only silence.

Sasha smiled at him, and though the smile was mischievous, in her eyes was the momentary tenderness a woman feels for one who tries and fails.

"Never mind, Gary," she comforted. "They do not know you well enough yet. Ah, see how beautiful they are getting!" A shadowy form emerged from the fog. The fox stood a moment watching them, its astute little face on one side; then it sidled off into the mist again.

The animals, in summer only about the size of a large cat, were, with the approach of colder weather, taking on a thicker, heavier coat of fur exquisite in its maltese lustre. Gary at first had been surprised at their smallness, for two of them could easily be carried in a gunnysack. It was judicious stretching which turned the green pelt into the long silken neck-piece of commerce.

When he commented on the color, she nodded. "It's really camouflage, too, you know. If these same foxes were up in the Arctic they'd be snow white now. The blues and whites are not a different species, merely color phases of the same fox. They change their color according to the latitude. Isn't it clever of the darlings!"

She continued with enthusiasm telling him what she had read of the animals, interspersing her information with quaint observations of her own.

"You will see how Feodor handles them—just like babies!" she concluded. "I'm so happy because he is coming home tomorrow."

When they reached the feeding-station and Gary

had emptied his buckets, the girl suggested continuing down the beach to Lampadny Point and crossing over to the tomb of Father Paul. "I like to walk in thick fog," she explained.

Locating the trail across the Point was not an easy matter, but Sasha found it at last and they walked along it single file. In the cool density only a narrow circle of yellowed rice-grass was visible about them. The wheat-like heads, silvered with moisture, were empty husks now, and the brown pods of the lupine too, had burst, spilling their seeds to the ground. Like shadowy drawings on the background of the mist, tall, dried stalks of dead Indian celery held aloft the umbrella-shaped skeletons of summer flowers. The passing of the girl and the man stirred the damp scent of dried grasses and leaves mellowed by the frost into a covering for the winter cradle of all this slumbering life.

They had traversed half the way across the Point in silence when the quiet was broken by the unmistakable sound of voices coming from ahead. Sasha stopped and tried to pierce the vapor. "Some one visiting Father Paul," she said; then sent out a clear hullo in the direction of the old missionary's tomb.

No answering call came back, and to Gary the muffled silence which followed was somehow ominous. The girl's eyes were puzzled when they met his.

"Why—they don't answer," she said slowly; then more quickly, "let's hurry and see who it is."

As they hastened along the narrow trail the clank of oar-locks floated in through the fog, and a few moments later, when they emerged at the edge of the outer beach, the deadened, intermittent bark of a starting engine came to them. It was followed by the con-

tinuous throb of a speeding launch hidden away in the white mist that was thick upon the sea. Gary, with the launchman's instinct, listened curiously to the peculiar, irregular pulsations of the motor.

"Strange they didn't wait for us!" Sasha turned to him. "Perhaps they didn't hear me . . . Or they might be going around to the ranch-house now." She, too, tilted her head listening to the diminishing sound of the exhaust. "No," she reconsidered. "They're heading right out to sea. Halibut fishermen, very likely. The Colonel and I saw a couple of fishing-schooners in the offing the other day."

Gary was bending to examine the footprints in the sand. From the indications two men had been ashore, the tomb their destination. They had walked from the landing-place of their skiff, but—he wondered if they had not run back to it. The shortened, deep-toed impressions left by their returning feet would indicate as much. But of this he said nothing to Sasha.

"They came ashore to light Father Paul's lamp," said the girl confidently, as they moved toward the six-foot cross looming dimly through the fog.

She climbed to the flat-topped tomb, and wiping the befogged glass over the *lampada*, peered into the recess. Her indignant voice floated to him as she opened the little door.

"Why, Gary, they never put a *drop* of oil in the lamp!" She held out the heavy glass bowl toward him. It was empty. He knew how Sasha's inborn romanticism delighted in the old Muscovite custom of her ancestors, a custom still observed by the fishermen of the coast who gave thanks for a good fish run by

lighting the lamp. Because he himself had felt the mediæval charm of this practice, he understood Sasha's annoyance, yet he wondered if underneath the whole incident there was not something more than either of them suspected.

But he shook off the thought impatiently. Surely Sasha, living in this country all her life, would know the ways of her countrymen better than he—a tender-foot. He shrank from appearing an alarmist in her eyes.

"Perhaps—Well, I don't know much about your customs, Sasha, but perhaps they forgot the oil, but just came to say a prayer—or something like that," he managed in the half-bashful manner of men who speak seldom of sacred things. He bent to look again at the footprints that encircled the tomb.

"Of course! That's what they must have done." But the girl's face was shadowed; then meeting his solicitous eyes she gave an apologetic little laugh. "It's impolite of them, anyway. And this fog—it makes it seem mysterious, and I don't like mysteries on my Island!"

They talked of other things as they retraced their steps.

A breeze began to stir when they were half-way home, and with a swiftness almost incredible the fog rolled seaward.

As the float stood out clear again, Sasha exclaimed: "Nicolai must be here! See the *Pup* alongside the *Simmie and Ann*! Perhaps he has brought Feodor home!" An amused look came into her eyes as she continued slowly: "Now . . . I wonder if it could have been he who went—but no—" She shook her

fog-dampened head, and her laugh held an undertone of amusement. "One could hardly connect Nicolai with any act of piety, the bad boy. Besides he's never grateful for anything. But I'll ask him, anyway, about the lamp of Father Paul," she concluded, as Gary left her to go to the barn.

But when the girl entered the living-room all thought of the afternoon event vanished. She found Colonel Jeff in his chair by the fireplace, his rheumatic leg straight out in front of him, his sparse hair standing on end, and his arm going up and down like a pump handle. He was emphasizing remarks addressed to the obviously inattentive Nicolai who leaned against the mantel.

"Hell's bells!" roared the Colonel. "If I had my hands on the scoundrel I'd kick him higher than the Devil can spit, so help me *G*—excuse me, Sasha, I—I didn't know you were back. But—but—" he stuttered in his effort to curb his language. "But I must express myself, by the lord! Sasha!" he looked up from his chair, bulbous nose shining, small eyes gleaming through his glasses, both palms outthrust in impotent anger. "Sasha, with me here helpless as a bug on its back, and work piling up higher every day on this ranch, *what* do you think that muffle-headed, fatuous son-of-a-gun has gone and done?"

"But, Colonel, who—what——"

The Colonel's reverberating bellow swallowed Sasha's voice, as he smote the arm of the chair with his fist. "Done deliberately, diabolically, with malice aforethought, by the lord, consorting with his kind in a *macoola* bat——"

Sasha turned impatiently to Nick, as the Colonel,

with maddening obscurity, continued to berate the unknown offender.

"Mercy, Nicolai, what *is* the matter?" she asked.

The trader shrugged his shoulders, tapped a fresh cigarette against his hand and replied nonchalantly:

"Oh, nothing much. Feodor got drunk again last night and broke his arm over."

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER his announcement, Nick stood erect, flicked a match into flame with his thumbnail, and applied it to his cigarette. Sasha's exclamation of dismay drew an oblique glance from his somnolent eyes. A few moments later he spoke sympathetically of her predicament.

"It's darned hard luck, I'll say, Sasha," he concluded. "Especially, when the Colonel is laid up with rheumatism and the trapping season is nearly here. Too bad you haven't a man working for you that knows foxes. Not that Tynan isn't a willing worker," he hastened to concede the absent man justice, "but the chap is a cheechako, after all, and he can't be expected to know everything." His tone conveyed the generous understanding of one who does know the ways of a hard country and is able to cope with them intelligently.

His quiet air of authority was especially effective today because of his physical appearance. He wore his customary outdoor clothes of forestry cloth and leather puttees, but the suit had been made by the best tailor in San Francisco. It set off the width of his shoulders and the symmetry of his slender, athletic limbs. In contrast with its dark green his freshly shaved face

and sleek light hair achieved for him the clean, youthful look of the well-groomed blond male. Every line of him suggested latent power, swift action, and strength on which a woman might depend—if Nick loved her.

But the girl who was in trouble now asked no advice from him. Neither did he offer any.

An hour later, when he was leaving, they were alone for a few minutes on the veranda. There came one of the pauses in conversation that is vibrant with unspoken thoughts. He stood looking down on her soft, bronze hair stirring in the wind.

"Well . . ." He held out his hand. "Good-bye, little fox-rancher." He spoke slowly, with a perceptible pause between the words as if he waited for her to ask him some question.

"Good-bye, Nicolai."

"Your fingers are cold," he said with unwonted gentleness. "See—" He smiled down at her, cupping her small hand in the comfortable warmth of both his own. "That's how I'd like to keep all the cold things of life away from you, Sasha. Just like that—if you'd let me."

She withdrew her fingers slowly, her gaze on the bay. When she said nothing Nick thrust his hands into the pockets of his knickerbockers, and with one of his odd returns to boyish mannerisms, hung his head as he stood on one foot, swinging the other in a small half-circle. "I—I want to do things for you, Sasha . . . but you'll never ask me, will you? I know I'm—I'm clumsy and hot-headed, and all; but I—oh, hang it—" the swinging foot came to firm rest beside the other and he lifted his head decisively. "Do you think

I'd come over here with bad news and never plan a way to help you out, Sasha, even though I do think it's foolishness for you to be running this blamed ranch?" She turned to face him. "Tynan can't do the work alone here much longer, and the Colonel looks as if he's in for a siege of rheumatism, so I've brought Side-money over with me—he's an old fox-man—and I'm going to leave him here whether you say so or not," he announced firmly. "It's what your father would expect—and mine too. . . . Well, good-bye, Sasha!" And without waiting for her to speak he lifted his hat and started abruptly away.

"Oh, Nicolai!" the girl ran after him as he was descending the steps, and laid a detaining hand on his arm. His half-embarrassed way of offering her help was completely disarming. "Nick, don't think I'm ungrateful!" she explained. "You *are* good and generous, I know, and I shall be glad to have Side-money—until Dad gets home. Thank you . . . thank you. . . ."

Standing on the bottom step his eyes were level with hers when he faced her. His smile was whimsical, and a trifle magnanimous, as if he remembered the night she had told him she could manage her affairs without his advice.

"It's not so bad to have good, old reliable Nick around, after all, is it?" he said.

She watched him swinging arrogantly along toward the float, his stiff-brimmed sombrero a trifle aslant. She could understand how another woman might grow to love Nick, with his changing moods, his masculine, dominant ways that lent his brief lapses into gentleness a fictitious charm out of all proportion to their

meaning. But—she smiled to herself—it wouldn't have been Nick if he had gone today without leaving behind him the impression of one who, though wronged, has been very generous.

Turning to go into the house, she saw Zoya dodge back from one of the living-room windows, but by the time she entered, the creole girl had gone on into the kitchen. After stopping to tell the Colonel of the addition to their working force provided by Nick, Sasha followed to share her information with Zoya, whom she found standing at a table with her back to the door, intent, apparently, on peeling potatoes for supper.

"Isn't it fine of Nicolai to lend us his man?" she called brightly. "He—" She paused. Something in the rigidity of the half-breed's back caused a look of concern to flash across her mobile features. "Why, *rodnaya!*" She ran to the girl. "You're crying! What's the matter, honey? Tell me!" She tried to gather Zoya into her small arms. "Come and tell me all about it."

The words of sympathy broke down Zoya's restraint, and she sank her dark head on the shoulder of her comforter, weeping in a strange, hopeless manner that shook her from head to foot.

Alarmed by such prolonged and wordless grief, Sasha led her to a cushioned window-bench and held her, patting her back and murmuring little Russian endearments, until, worn out by the intensity of her emotion, Zoya's convulsive sobs grew weaker and farther between.

"Of course," Sasha concluded, with the air of one who has solved a problem, "I know it's Feodor again. But don't you worry about him, dear. His arm can't

be broken any worse than it was the other time, you know."

Zoya raised her head from the dampness of Sasha's shoulder with surprising suddenness. Through a mist of misery great brown eyes looked a moment into amber ones. Incredulity was succeeded by affection in the tearful gaze before the creole caught the white girl's hands and kissed them with fervor that had something penitential in it.

"*Solnishko moyo*, you are good—too good to me!" she sobbed with apparent irrelevance. "I—I—Oh, Sasha, I——"

The sentence was never finished, for Gary's footsteps sounded at the back door at that moment, and Zoya, with the swiftness of a hurt animal, fled up the back stairs to hide her tear-stained face.

Sasha was puzzled over the other girl's distress. Though Zoya had been somewhat distraught and silent for a few days, she was not one given to easy tears. What could have happened today, besides the news of Feodor's broken arm, to cause such grief? Could Nick have said some thoughtless thing and hurt her?

With this thought came the memory of Zoya, watching him leave the veranda—or had she been watching him? It was strange about those two. When Sasha and the creole girl were children, Nick, seven years older, had always treated them alike with boyish tolerance. After he had been to the States to school this changed to condescension. Still later he began to take a diabolic delight in teasing the bashful Zoya about fictitious sweethearts, just to see her resent his maddening suppositions with flashing eyes and quick Russian

denials. Zoya was always handsome when angry. Then, Sasha remembered, when Nicolai returned from France a gradual change came in his attitude toward the girl. Sometimes, when in Father Anton's house at Rezanoff, he seemed deliberately to ignore her. Since they had moved to Rocking Moon, it was seldom that Sasha had seen Nick address her outside of a greeting and a farewell.

Sasha, always loyal, had resented this coldness toward their old playmate, almost as much as she regretted Nick's disconcerting lover-like warmth toward herself. She could not, however, conceive of Nick's deliberately hurting Zoya.

That night as she sat before her dressing-table, preparing for bed, the mirror gave back the reflection of Zoya entering her room, her usual good-night custom. There was a striking contrast between the two—Sasha, fair-skinned, bright-haired, seeming in her pale green satin kimono almost childlike compared to the taller, darker Zoya.

All traces of grief had vanished from the creole's face, but in her eyes was still the uncertain, half-fearful look, as if that had happened which she could not yet believe. She seemed oddly reluctant to go upstairs to her own room. She walked about aimlessly, picking up objects from the dresser, from the desk. Finally, taking a hairbrush she regarded it as she turned it over and over in her fingers.

"Sasha, *solnishko*, perhaps tonight you will like me to brush out your hair?" she suggested with a hint of timidity in her tone.

That sympathetic perception, which was so strong in her caused Sasha to accept the offer with sweet

gratitude, and as the other girl brushed the shining, wavy masses, she continued, with the intent of distracting Zoya's mind:

"That's the one thing in the world I'd like to have a maid for—and I'll have one, too, Zoya, when I've made Rocking Moon the biggest, most successful fox-ranch on the coast. Think what that will mean, dear!" Her eyes sparkled and her hands gestured at her slim reflection. "We'll both go down to the United States then and see some of the wonderful things Nick and Dad and Gary have told about. Do you know, honey, Gary told me today that there is a restaurant in San Francisco, *under a sidewalk*, mind you, where two thousand people can sit down to dinner at one time—with all the rest of the city walking over their heads! Can you imagine it! Four times as many as we have in the whole village of Rezanoff! And there are beautiful paintings and flowers all about them, and music playing—such music as we hear on the phonograph, only the diners can *see* the musicians playing!"

Zoya's incredulous look proclaimed her interest. She paused holding the brush poised as she gazed into the amber eyes that met hers in the mirror.

"Two—thousand—people!" she repeated in slow wonder. "Oh, the dishes they must have to wash in that place!"

"And Gary told me," went on Sasha, warming to her subject, "that there are buildings twenty stories and more, high—as high as the hill back of Rezanoff. There are many of them on both sides of the streets—like the ones we see in moving pictures, you know, and each one contains hundreds of rooms, as small as this one here, called offices, where girls like you and

me work all day. He says in winter, when the lights come on early, you can look up from across the street, and through the windows see layer after layer of those rooms one on top of another, with the girls working away as late as five o'clock in the afternoon. Think of being cooped up like a fox in a pen for eight long hours every day! Poor girls!"

Zoya, shaking her dark head and clucking her tongue in commiseration, returned to her brushing.

"And they have to go on working that way until some of the men—confined in the office with them most likely, marry them. Even then it isn't much better, Gary says, for the girls set up housekeeping in other big buildings called apartments, Zoya. Some of the apartments are only one room, not half as big as our living-room and the bed slides under the bathroom, and the dining-room table is the living-room table, and not a soul knows his neighbor in the next apartment. They have to keep their doors locked all the time, too, for there are men in the cities who make a profession of stealing. What hardships! What a life!

"We couldn't live like that, could we, Zoya?"

The creole shook her head in negation. "And Garee—will he be going back to the United States to live?" she inquired.

Sasha's face became serious. "I—I don't know," she answered slowly. "I hope he won't, Zoya."

"You like Garee? You like him better than Nicolai?" The questions came eagerly and the mirror reflected the creole's waiting attitude. During the pause that followed the rising wind rattled the window behind them and the shade rubbed noisily against the sides of the frame.

Sasha said: "Nicolai is like one of our family. I like Gary differently."

"Perhaps—" Zoya passed the brush down the length of the shining hair. "Perhaps it is that you love Garee," she said softly.

Sasha shook her hair over her flushing face and laughed.

"You are too sentimental, Zoya. . . . What do you know of love, you beautiful, dusky thing!"

A look of bitterness came suddenly into the half-breed's face.

"Dusky! Dusky!" she repeated, with a note of rising passion in her voice. "Yes. Dusky! Look at us!"

Surprised at the outburst, the white girl parted her curls hastily and raised her eyes.

Like a picture in a frame the two were reflected in the mirror—one the white and gold dawn, the other the sullen, amber dusk. The creole held a handful of her loosened ebon hair against the lustrous bronze below her.

"Look!" she cried, her black brows drawn together. "Look!" she commanded, and there was despair in her tone as she stripped her sleeve back and placed her tawny slender hand beside the little white one. "*That* is what love does! White fathers we both had—but because my Aleut mother dared to love a white man I am not white. I am not brown. I am *nothing*! No Indian can I love and marry, because my heart is white and will not let me. No white man will marry me because my skin is dark. What have I done to deserve this? What have I done that I must suffer and go alone all my life because of the love of my

mother?" she demanded passionately, her dark eyes flashing a protest against Fate. "What is left for me but to take love where I find it—a little here when it comes, a little there when it comes!"

The hairbrush fell clattering to the floor.

"Why Zoya, I never heard you speak——"

Unheeding, the creole went on: "Yes! Let the white man say: 'You half-breeds are too easy—too quick to surrender!' " she quoted bitterly. "But—what else is there for us? No white man will marry us, and soon—oh, so soon we are old. Love is not for the old. I will have it now! *Now!*" She drew back her head as if defying God Himself, and struck her chest with her clenched hands. "Though it is sin—though I burn in hell for a million years, I will have a white man's arms about me! I will have a white man's kisses on my face——"

"Oh, Zoya—Zoya—*please—*" Sasha, alarmed and pitying, sprang up and turned to clasp the other about the waist. "You hurt me when you talk so, *milaya*. Of course you shall have a white lover. You are so beautiful, so gentle, so good, Zoya!" She snuggled her head against the dark shoulder, trying to coax the rigid figure back to relaxation. "And to love—" she continued, half-shyly, "it is no sin, honey. It is—it must be very wonderful. . . . We both shall know, some day." She paused, then demanded protectingly: "Who's been telling you all those things about creoles, honey? Who's been making you unhappy lately? Some of those cannerymen in Rezanoff?"

The whine of the wind was the only sound for a few moments. Already the half-breed's protesting white blood was cooling and the submissive Aleut in

her coming to its own. She looked down into Sasha's face, and as if her mind had come back from the contemplation of some distant thing, she ran her slim hands gently down the other's hair. "Nobody tells me these things, *solnishko*," she denied wearily, hesitating between the words. "Only—sometimes they come to me when I—I see your skin so white, so white, and your hair so shining. . . . Sasha, I'd give—I'd give my soul to be a white woman just for one day." The longing in her voice lingered on the air after she had ceased speaking.

Helpless to comfort, except by a display of her own affection, Sasha tightened her arms about her friend. The two girls stood silent, numbed by the cruelty of this mysterious, unanswerable problem of life.

The wind wafted in great sighs about the house, and there was the dull sound of charred logs falling in the living-room fireplace. After a time they heard the single tap of the ship's bell outside on the porch. Sasha stirred.

"The East Wind, Zoya," she said.

"Yes. The Spirit Wind of Oo-koon." The creole shivered.

"You're cold, honey. Come, we'd better both go to bed. In the morning everything will look brighter. Night is shadow time, anyway." Sasha drew her companion toward the door and opened it. "I'll take you upstairs."

Arm in arm the two girls ascended the steps. The light was dim in the unfinished hall and as the draft swept through it the flame of the bracket lamp flickered. The Colonel's peaceful snores bubbled out from behind his closed door. Then, unmistakably, there came

the muffled sound of a voice from Seenia's room. They paused to listen.

"Spirits, I call! I call!" Faint and thin the eldritch cadence rose. "Tell me truth! Where does it hide?"

Sasha shook her head pityingly. "Poor old Seenia," she whispered. "She's at it again. She still thinks the Spirit Wind can tell her where she's hidden the Mask of Jade. . . . I wish it could. But you run along to bed, dear. I'll go in and talk to her. Good night, Zoya. Pleasant dreams."

When Sasha stepped inside the old Aleut's room, the creole stood a moment gazing at the closed door. Then she walked slowly to her own room.

She turned up the wick of the lamp on the little table beside her narrow white bed, and crossed over to a vermilion Chinese chest in which she kept her clothes. Her bare, tawny arm slipped down among the neatly folded garments to the bottom. She drew out a post-card photograph, and stood looking with troubled eyes into the pictured face of Nicholas Nash. Slim, arrogant and alluringly reckless he appeared in his uniform and overseas cap. He had sent the post card from France to Sasha, who had never yet solved the mystery of its disappearance.

Zoya suddenly flattened the picture against her breast and glanced defiantly to that corner of the room where an icon of the Virgin smiled down at her. The next instant she slipped the card beneath her pillow, and making the sign of the cross, dropped penitently on her knees before that symbol of mother-love. Her long hair fell about her and over her face as she whispered her prayers. The wind rattled the window near her and the swelling diapason of the surf on the outer

beach drifted across the Island into the room. She prayed the long earnest prayers of one in trouble.

She finished at last and slipped off her kimono.

She was stepping into bed when the bell on the porch below again sounded a single, ghostly stroke. The girl turned her head, listening, considering. A strange look, like the birth of a forbidden idea, flashed into her dark eyes. Indecision held her for a moment. Then she cautiously tiptoed to the vermilion chest.

From the depths she brought an object no larger than an egg, a roll made of the fine grasses that grow only on the last island of the Aleutians, out where the West has become the East. It was a heathen thing containing a sacred herb, a match, a needle, a bit of ermine fur, and a piece of gold—an Aleutian spirit charm the like of which every Russian priest, since the days of the first Anton Larianoff, has tried to banish.

Zoya turned her light out, and with the charm held tightly, groped her way toward the vague opaque casement looking out on the dim, wind-torn bay. She squatted on the floor like a Buddha draped in long, dark hair and closing her troubled eyes, held out her arms toward the East, toward Oo-koon, with the charm lying flat across her palms.

After a long rigid moment she dropped them, and huddling in the darkness began tapping the sole of her bare foot with the mystic roll. The muted sound of her voice mingled with the weird flutings of wind and sea and tossing forest. "Oh, Spirits, I call! I call!" It rose and fell in an eerie chant of broken minors—the timbre of which is older by thousands of years than Christianity. "Come to me on the wind—the East

Wind of Oo-koon! Spirit of fire! Spirits of the Dead!
Tell me truth . . ."

Zoya, the half-breed, sat with her back to the Virgin,
sending out her anguished call into the night.

She was performing the forbidden Aleut mystery of
"Talking to the Foot."

CHAPTER XIV

CLEAR, cold weather came—crisp, frosty blue nights, alight with the luster of stars that fringed the shimmering banners of the Northern Lights; pale gold days when the sun, swinging south, smiled brilliantly, but without warmth, and flung the dust of amethysts over the distant white ranges of the mainland. Toyon Lake froze over, and flashed like a blue diamond set in the amber of yellowing reeds. The bidarka, useless now, was brought to the barn and stowed away in the loft in front of a smaller, one-hatch skin craft, a kayak. Loose shingles on house and barn were nailed down and the moss chinking in the log walls of the other buildings was replenished. The pungent savor of brush-fires sending up blue smoke from the clearing back of the house set Sasha planning for next year's enlarged garden, as she took in the tiny silver tree-bells from the alder grove.

Side-money, whose other names remained a mystery which no one thought of solving, proved to be an uncouth fellow, but good-natured and a willing and intelligent worker with foxes. His one form of recreation was wandering about the Island gathering seashells from the beaches. He brought these home in a small knapsack he always carried with him, and later painted on them in colors of particular virulency, scenes he copied from tinted Alaskan postcards. He spoke with

pride of a time when he was a stevedore in Juneau and had made considerable side-money selling these to tourists. Nearly every day he edged confidentially up to Sasha and presented her with one of his livid masterpieces, until the mantel broke out into a measles of purple glaciers, cerise mountain peaks, and raw sienna canoes on leaden streams that ran in the perpendicular. The beauty-loving Sasha, powerless to stem the tide of his generosity, began to wear a hunted look whenever she saw him coming. Since she was too truthful to say anything in praise of his art, she confined herself to admiring the undecorated treasures, adding: "Why, Side-money, I've never seen such shells on Rocking Moon before! You know every foot of my Island, don't you?"

Colonel Jeff, still confined to his chair, divided his time between reading about all the late world calamities in the month-old newspapers, cursing the absent Feodor, and making what he called an "outfit" for the hairless Sampson. The little fox, though faithfully rubbed with hair-tonic, was still naked as a door-knob, and Colonel Jeff, after cutting out and discarding innumerable paper patterns, was at last sewing clumsily on a species of fox union-suit for his pet—the same being made of the old man's warmest sweater.

The autumn days went swiftly by thronged with work, interspersed, as is the custom of the country, with a good deal of recreation. Sasha and Gary went skating nearly every afternoon on Toyon Lake. Occasionally Zoya, strangely quiet these days, went with them, but she skated alone. Neither the young man's teasing nor Sasha's coaxing could persuade her to join hands with them as they skimmed, laughing, down the

smooth, inviting stretch of ice. Sometimes the creole, a tall, vivid figure in scarlet cap and sweater, would stand apparently watching, but in her dark eyes was the look of one who knows she is powerless to escape some Damoclean sword whose single thread is nearly severed.

One afternoon as she stood thus looking at the two merry skaters making curves so ludicrously elaborate that they could hardly maintain their balance for laughing at themselves, Side-money emerged from the forest trail dangling a pair of new skates in his mittened hand. When he had strapped them to his boots, he approached her in a few clumsy strokes, and laid a hand familiarly on her arm.

"Come on, kid, let's me'n you show 'em a few fancy stunts!" he said confidently.

Zoya turned slowly and for a moment allowed her eyes to rest on the squat figure with a gaze that was cold, impersonal and indifferent. Then she removed the offending hand and in studied silence swept off toward the far end of the lake.

On one such afternoon Nicholas Nash dropped in for one of his flying visits on his way to Oo-koon. He followed the Colonel's directions, and borrowing Side-money's skates from the nail in the barn, joined the others at the Lake. Sasha, catching sight of him, waved from a distance. He stood on the shore watching her sulkily as she glided toward him with Gary, but at her bright welcoming smile, he checked the words he seemed about to utter, and greeted them both pleasantly enough before he asked Sasha to skate. She took turns first with one and then with the other of the two men.

Gary claimed Sasha a second time, and the trader

sped away by himself. Zoya, who had been sitting on the bank, watched him for a moment, then as if she had suddenly decided on a course of action, she followed him in long, skimming strokes, overtaking him at a wooded point. Side by side they passed beyond it and were soon out of sight of the others.

When they reappeared sometime later they were skating together as only two can skate who both have a primitive sense of bodily rhythm. Sasha and Gary, panting from their own exertions, paused to admire them.

"Aren't they a splendid couple!" exclaimed the girl, pleased. "I'm so glad Nick is being nice to Zoya today. I'm afraid she sometimes finds it dull and lonely here with just me for company, although she denies it, dear, loyal child. But I shall make it up to her, Gary! Just wait till I sell my fall stock of foxes!"

Later, when tea was being served in the living-room, Nick announced he had learned, on a recent visit to the wireless station at Kodiak, that the fox-pirates in Southeastern Alaska were active again.

"When you begin to trap, Sasha, you'd better have Tynan and Side-money keep a sharp lookout on the outer beach of the Island. Just trust to Side-money—he knows this fox game from A to Z," Nick advised.

The trader also arranged to buy five pairs of Rocking Moon Blues to augment his stock on Oo-koon. His friendliness extended even to Gary, whom he invited to visit his ranch, stipulating, however, that he would himself take the cheechako there in a couple of weeks.

After bidding Nick good-bye, Sasha stood in the doorway watching him and Side-money walk down to the float where the *Seal Pup* lay rocking.

"Nicolai hasn't had one of his moody spells for a long time, Colonel Jeff," she called back over her shoulder. "He's getting positively angelic."

The Colonel, intent on the last stitches of Sampson's union-suit, grunted.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that. He's up to something, for he brought me a power-of-attorney today, so I can act in all his affairs for him in his absence. Says he may take a trip after the first of the year."

Upstairs in her room Zoya was also watching Nick and Side-money as they stood on the float in earnest conversation. When the launch finally pulled out with the trader, she turned away. Then slowly as an old woman she walked to her little white bed and lay there with still, upturned face. Presently tears welled in her wide-open eyes to roll steadily, one after another across her cheeks, seeping along the beautiful tawny throat that Nicholas Nash had kissed.

On the afternoon following the trader's visit, the box-traps were put in readiness for the trapping and baited with food. The next morning when Sasha and her two assistants started out on the *Simmie and Ann* eager to see what the night's catch had been, the Colonel was loud in his lamentations because he could not go with them. But later he managed to hobble down on his crutches to welcome the returning launch as it came chugging importantly in with its after-deck loaded with cages of imprisoned foxes.

"A fox in every trap, Colonel!" Sasha exclaimed, springing from the deck to the float. "But Side-money selected only four to sell as breeding stock. See them!"

She indicated four boxes screened with wire netting, from which yellow eyes peered out sulkily.

The animals were taken to the large, wire-enclosed corral back of the barn, and liberated; but they trotted ceaselessly about their prison, poking their pointed noses into every corner and scratching frantically in their efforts to find a way to freedom. Side-money guffawed at the bewilderment of the beautiful, silky-coated creatures, but Sasha and Gary tried to soothe them with gentle words and coaxing sounds. They even placed the bored Alexander in the pen for half an hour, hoping that by some subtle method of fox communication the tamed animal might convey assurance to the wild things that had never before felt confinement.

That evening the family were all gathered in the living-room watching Alexander go through his tricks. Gary, boyishly proud of his way with animals, had added another act to the performance, with the assistance of Edgar Allan Poe, a blackbird, that had become so tame it traveled all over the Island on the young man's shoulder. How he had managed it remained a mystery, but now, when shown a piece of bread, the greedy Poe would flutter to where Alexander sat on his haunches waiting in dignified misery, and perch confidently on the fox's head. When the bird alighted, though Alexander's yellow eyes focused tensely on Gary, and he trembled with suppressed desires, he never tried to molest the trusting Poe.

Side-money, who openly longed for fox-nature to assert itself during this performance, watched until the completion of the act, and then announced his intention of going out to pay a last visit to the captives.

It was an hour before he returned. He walked over to Gary and dangled something before the young man's

face. "Say, Tynan," he drawled, "you better take better care of your watch. I found it out in the corral just a little while ago."

"Confound that strap," said Gary, running his fingers along the worn leather. "I'll have to see if I can't get it fixed in Rezanoff. Thanks, old man."

Side-money settled himself in a chair outside the circle of the lamplight and began unloading from his pockets the day's accumulation of shells.

"The tide was out," he informed them, polishing a limpet cone with the flat of his hand, "and I took a little hike down to Lampadny Point just to see how things are lookin'." He paused to rub a palm across his thick, blue lips. "An' what do you think? Some o' them goofy guys that's all the time a-prayin' to Tin Peters has gone and put an honest-to-God lamp with a reflector in that old bird's cupboard on the cross! Some style! Ha! Ha!"

"Do you mean the *lampada* of Father Paul?" Sasha asked.

"Uh-huh!" the man nodded. "But it ain't lit. Leastways it wasn't when I came along."

"Why, what a-an unpleasantly *modern* thing to do!" Sasha exclaimed.

"By the lord, I don't like it!" asserted the Colonel testily. "That Father Paul business was all right before Rocking Moon became a fox-ranch, but if this was my island, Sasha, my dear, I'd have a sign put up now, as they have on all other fox-islands: NO TRESPASSING. I'll bet this is the only fur farm in Alaska that hasn't such a sign."

"Oh, I couldn't do that, Colonel Jeff! Our people have been putting oil in Father Paul's lamp for nearly

a hundred years—and I couldn't change the old custom now. Besides, I'm sure Dad wouldn't have me do it."

"If your Dad were here, it'd be all right. He's got the whole country eating out of his hand—but . . ." He swept a match against the roughened surface of his old match-safe and applied the flame to the bowl of his pipe, puffing fiercely.

No one said anything more about the *lampada* and the talk soon drifted to the foxes. Before bedtime it was decided that a few days should elapse before any more were trapped.

The quiet of the still, cold Alaskan night had settled down on the house and Sasha had been asleep an hour when the door of her room opened cautiously and into the moonlit dimness came the tall figure of Zoya. She was fully dressed, but her slippered feet made no sound on the floor. She stood a moment looking at the sleeping girl lying in her narrow, white bed, bronzed hair a touseled, silken mass about her pillowed head, one arm outstretched on the coverlet with the fingers curling into the palm. Then she went softly to the bedside and knelt down, placing a tear-wet cheek against the counterpane near Sasha's hand. There was devotion and a hopeless sadness in the action.

The little clock on the table ticked away five minutes before she stirred. With a movement so slow it was scarcely perceptible, she kissed the bare arm of the sleeping girl. As silently as she had come, she slipped away, closing the door gently behind her.

Morning came with its round of activities—a dark morning of late October. Gary and Side-money built

the fires at the house and passed on to the work in the lantern-lighted barn. The Colonel on his crutches, thumped downstairs to his comfortable chair by the crackling hearth-fire. Sasha came singing from her room to the kitchen door, and opened it to stand in muted surprise on the threshold.

Zoya was not there. Neither was there any sign of breakfast preparations. In the clean warmth of the quiet room the snapping of the fire in the range sounded louder than usual, and the morning lamp-light fell on rows of copper pots and pans hanging in their places. The silence, the undisturbed condition of the shining cooking utensils, were somehow disquieting. The girl looked quickly about her and went to the door of the living-room.

"Zoya?" she called, with a rising inflection.

"She's not down yet, my dear!" boomed the Colonel.

With concern on her face Sasha ascended the stairs and opened the door of the creole's room. She paused inside, her hands clasped, surprise, apprehension clouding her eyes.

Pillow and counterpane on the bed were smooth, undisturbed.

"Zoya! . . . Zoya!" The name came huskily, almost in a whisper as Sasha stepped across the room. Here and there she ran looking into the closet, under the bed, everywhere a person might hide.

"Zoya?" There was alarm in her voice as she opened the door of Seenia's room and called.

"She is not come in here yet," answered the old woman.

Sasha ran down to the kitchen again, and finding it still ominously empty, plunged out into the dim, cold

light of morning, to the pathway that led to the barn.

Half way through the leafless grove she met Gary. She grasped him by both arms, looking up into his face with wide, fearful eyes.

"Oh, Gary, Gary!" she gasped. "I—I can't find Zoya anywhere! I'm afraid something has happened to her!"

CHAPTER XV

HOURS later, after every part of the Island had been searched both by circling it in the launch and by going over the trails, this fear became a certainty. There was no trace of the girl. She had disappeared in complete mystery. Not a single trinket was missing from her room; none of her clothes were gone, except those she had worn the day before, and her scarlet cap and sweater. Owing to an extremely high tide no footprints were visible anywhere on the beach. No one had heard a launch in the night—not even Seenia, who was a light sleeper. The only possible explanation of Zoya's disappearance was that she might have gone for a walk to the Lookout and accidentally fallen off the cliff.

Sasha, thinking this over, began to wonder if such a fall would be accidental. She recalled the night in her room when Zoya had acted so strangely. Could it be that the girl had fallen hopelessly in love with some white man? Was that the reason for her sadness lately? She reproached herself now with remorseful tears. Why had she not taken more trouble to win Zoya's confidence?

As she went over the incidents of the last few weeks the conviction grew upon her that Zoya was unhappily in love. But with whom? Gary? Side-money? . . .

Nicolai? These were the only men the creole saw since coming to live on Rocking Moon. Slowly the unhappy Sasha discarded the first two as possibilities. But Nicolai? Could this be the reason for Nicolai's change of manner toward the creole girl?

Suddenly Sasha saw the trader's actions in the light of this understanding. Nick must have sensed Zoya's growing affection for him, and—honest old Nick—he had tried to discourage her by his indifference. Poor Zoya! Had her secret grief unsettled her mind? Had it driven her out in the night to leap deliberately off the cliff when the tide was high, and was her body even now floating out to sea?

Sasha said nothing to the Colonel of this fear, but she confided to Gary—without giving her reasons. The young man was as puzzled and fearful as the girl, though he tried to comfort her with the suggestion that Zoya had gone to the mainland to her mother with a passing fisherman—or possibly with Nicholas Nash. But why had she gone secretly and at night? They decided to go to Rezanoff and find out.

The *Simmie and Ann* was in readiness for the trip when the *Seal Pup* snorted into the bay. Nick's appearance just then, and his astonished concern at the news of Zoya's disappearance banished all hope of his having seen the girl. He was on his way from Ookoon to Rezanoff, but, looking down into Sasha's tear-stained face, he assured her that he would abandon all business to assist in the search. Because of his familiarity with the country and acquaintance with the fishermen and fox-ranchers, he would himself go to the various settlements nearby and see what he could learn of the missing girl. Accordingly, when the *Simmie and*

Ann headed for Rezanoff, the *Pup* turned toward the villages along the southern coast.

A week's fruitless searching and inquiry made the creole's death seem the only possible solution of the mystery, and against her will Sasha was forced to abandon the quest. One morning when the rose-tinted dawn made her grief-worn face the paler for contrast, she set out from Rezanoff for home.

The burden of the household work, all of which now fell to her lot, was not so hard to bear as the weight of omission on her conscience. During her waking hours she continually searched her mind to see what she might have said or done to comfort the unhappy girl. If her father had been home, it could not have happened, she told herself, and found what comfort she could in preparing for his return. He was expected in Seward within two weeks, and from that town would take the *Starr* to Rezanoff.

Meanwhile the fox-trapping went on slowly. With the Colonel unable to move from his chair and Gary knowing nothing of foxes, Side-money's judgment was the deciding factor in the choice of breeding stock; and though many foxes were made captive in the box-traps, Side-money was so meticulously discriminating in his choice of those animals to be sold, that the *Simmie* and *Ann* seldom brought back more than four at a time.

Gary and the other man took turns patrolling the outer beach during each tide, according to Nash's suggestion. But no one was ever seen to land on the Island, nor were any tracks found, except their own. Sometimes a launch or a schooner was sighted far out, and an occasional fishing boat anchored off shore, as the herring run had begun late in the year.

One evening Gary, with his sleeves rolled up and one of Zoya's aprons tied about him, was in the kitchen helping Sasha prepare the supper, when Side-money came in with half a halibut. It had been given him, he said, by the owner of a herring-boat, who had come ashore on the north end of Rocking Moon for water.

Sasha and Gary were in better spirits than they had been for some time, because of the fifty foxes that were milling about in the corral back of the barn.

"Only ten more to get, Sasha," he informed her, stabbing a fork into a potato to test it. "By the time your Dad gets here—" he broke off to concentrate on the pot as he walked awkwardly, apron flapping about his high boots, to drain the steaming water into the sink. "—by the time your Dad gets here—let's see, he ought to be arriving in a week now if he makes connections—we'll have the stage all set for the buyers!"

"I shall certainly be relieved when all the foxes are safely turned over to their new owners!" exclaimed the girl, stopping on her way to the table with a platter of browned halibut steaks in her hands. "Gary—" she looked up at him with a sly little smile, "I wouldn't tell Nicolai this for the world, but sometimes I think I'm not exactly suited for a business life. You know I'm thankful that I'll soon be sharing this responsibility with Dad! . . . But don't you dare tell!"

Before sitting down to the table she went to the door and called Alexander, returning after a moment with a ruffled brow. "I can't imagine where that little rascal is," she said as she seated herself. "I've called him several times this afternoon, but he hasn't come in."

When Toyon Lake first froze over, Sasha and Gary had talked of skating on it by moonlight, and the young man had even gathered logs for a bonfire, but Zoya's disappearance had put pleasure from their minds for a time. The first snowfall, expected any time, would put an end to the skating, and during supper Gary mentioned this. Colonel Jeff and Side-money volunteered to wash the dishes so that the other two might have a free evening to skate.

"Sasha, my dear, the exercise will do you good," the Colonel urged. "You've been indoors too much lately—entirely too much."

The girl eventually yielded and went off to dress, appearing half an hour later like a snow-sprite in white wool knickers and mackinaw. As she waited on the veranda for Gary to bring the skates from the shed, she made a megaphone of her mittened hands and sent out another call for Alexander.

"I've never known him to stay away from home a whole day before," she worried, as the man appeared a few minutes later. "Could it be that he's caught in a box-trap?"

"Oh, no!" Gary swung the clinking skates over his shoulder. "We didn't set the traps last night, you know. He'll come poking 'round the lake when we begin to skate."

They started off through the strangely radiant Northern night under stars that mocked and danced through the pale awakening flushes of the aurora. The air, fresh and incredibly pure, stung pleasantly in their nostrils as they walked single file along the hard frozen trail through yellowed, flattened grass glinting with frost. To the left lay the bay, inky, smooth, yet

shimmering with reflections from the sky. Into the darkness of the forest they passed, and Sasha dropped back to walk side by side with Gary beneath the thick branches that shut out the light of the stars as effectively as the vault of a cave. In the path of the flashlight great gray trunks of trees leaped at them from the pungent gloom. The muted sound of the sea came sighing in from the outer beach. Occasionally a cone thudded to the ground, and once a branch cracked sharply like the report of a small rifle.

But it was light again when they came out on the low bank of the Lake where the wood lay piled for the bonfire. Under the stars the long stretch of ice glittered like crystal bordered by the shadowy black and silver of the forest along the shores. Their breathing sent little clouds of vapor before them as they busied themselves with the fire.

The flames leaped high over the crackling logs, and momentary bursts of light flashed on the scene around them, driving the shadows into the forest at their backs. After her skates were fastened Sasha stood erect, her hands in the pockets of her mackinaw, her stocking-cap dangling a fat tassel over her eyes as she looked down on Gary, busy with his skates.

"Let's not do any fancy skating tonight, Gary," she suggested as she held out a hand to assist him to rise. This was one of the things about her which he found both absurd and lovable; small as she was, Sasha always insisted on helping everyone, man or woman, and in return she expected their co-operation in whatever she happened to be doing. To the little Alaskan there was no such thing as "woman's" work and "man's" work. It was all "our" work. He had at first been somewhat

embarrassed by her astonishing offers of assistance. Now he had come to accept them without protest, but always with a warming tenderness for this naïve companion who, though a woman, still retained much of the graciousness and simplicity that marks the child.

"Night is the time for skating that is simple, and straight and swift," she explained. "It makes you feel as if you were flying then. . . . Come, you Man of the South!" She grasped his hands and smiled up at him, "Come, and I'll show you the way to the Northern Lights!"

Overhead the night-blue was frosted with glittering stars, but in the North toward which they glided, the aurora had already begun its mysterious, pulsing sara-band of color.

In silence their long, swinging strokes carried them over the ice. Gary felt the wonder of perfect rhythm, perfect freedom, perfect companionship; a delight in the swift flying shadows along the shores, the ring of skates, and the cold, pure air breaking against his face. From far down the Lake above a ragged line of trees the magnetic North was beckoning. It seemed to him that he and the girl were speeding through ether spaces toward that evanescent radiance which grew into Polar hues. Beryl and amber, violet and rose, cardinal and silver tiptoed toward the zenith . . . merged into ghostly oriflammes, then serpentine in mad revelry across the sky. It was a display splendid, immense, but so silent that Gary found his ears aching to catch the inaudible music of the spheres. Then, of a sudden, the whole luminous shimmer stood still. The space of a breath, and it slowly flickered down to a glimmer of ivory mist through which the pale stars shone.

"Oh-o-o!" Sasha's low voice sounded as if she had come a long way down to earth. "Come, Gary. Let's skate back before it begins over again."

Half an hour later they rested on a log before the bonfire. Gary found himself watching the girl beside him as alternate bursts of golden light played over her. Seen thus she had that elusive touch of mystery that has made woman an unanswered question to man ever since the world began. As if his concentrated gaze had penetrated her thoughts she suddenly raised her eyes from the heart of the fire and smiled at him in such a friendly, intimate way that he found his heart beating faster. His mind reverted to the remark earlier in the evening concerning her father's arrival. He wondered if the advent of Father Anton would make any change in their lives, in their companionship.

He had always been a rover in his own land, until the war took him to foreign countries. He had known many women, alluring, lovable women, but whenever his freedom was threatened by matrimonial symptoms on his part, he had gone on to forgetfulness with little trouble. Marriage would mean settling down, a deadening thing for which he had no wish. But, it seemed to him, matrimony with Sasha would be loosed of its chains. She was one of those rare women a man wanted to take with him on joyful, care-free wanderings into the highways and byways of the world. Often when he was jaunting about the Island with her, afoot or afloat, he felt impelled to quote to her the lines that always came to him:

Two together!

Winds blow South, or winds blow North,

*Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.*

But he had never done it. He had no right to say anything to a woman which might lead to love. He had nothing to offer. Aimlessly, it seemed to him, he had been drifting along during these weeks at Rocking Moon, content to be a part of the fascinating, homely life of the farm, almost without thought of the future. Yet, had he been so entirely aimless? he asked himself. Some good had come to him, for no longer did the horrible figures with oozing wounds rise from his subconscious mind to harrow him, and under his mental lethargy he was vaguely aware that his spirit was groping its way through the fog, which lifted sometimes for a single, dazzling second, as it had tonight when he was skating toward the Polar lights—lifted, giving him a thrilling sense of greater vision, a feeling of elemental power, before it closed down again. Some day this mist must clear away forever, and when it did, when he felt again the ability to create, to write, he would

Sasha's soft, husky voice broke the stillness.

"Tonight it seems as if we are the only two in all the wide, mysterious world," she said wonderingly. "Tonight, Gary, we are comrades of the Infinite." She tilted her chin to watch the sky where the lights were again at their quiet, colorful beckoning. "Tell me some of the ponderous thoughts that are keeping you so silent."

There was a pause before he answered, then he spoke slowly as if he selected the words carefully before

forming them. "I was thinking of all this, Sasha—the woods and the sea and the last few weeks up here. It's so utterly different from anything I've ever known. The country—" He stopped. A sudden flash of self-analysis told him that his enthusiasm for the country was colored, inspired, by his thoughts of her. He knew that the night, without her, would lose its soul. It would be beautiful—but awesomely lonely in its cold brilliancy,—a dying bonfire on the shores of a frozen lake, backed by the black-shadowed forest. It was the glamour of her nearness that made it magical for him.

Her voice recalled him: "Yes? I am listening, Gary." She leaned over and placed a mittened hand lightly on his knee. "I like to hear you say beautiful things about my country—for then I know you will be staying long among us."

With any other girl he would have covered the hand with his own, but now, because he wanted to do it more than anything else in the world, he sat passive, outwardly, though the perilously sweet consciousness of it caused him to stammer as he asked:

"Do—do *you* want me to stay long, Sasha?"

"Yes." In the starlight her eyes looked into his. "I like you, Gary." Then, as if she read something of his feeling for her, she became conscious of her hand, withdrew it and rose quickly.

"Wait a minute, Sasha!" He sprang up impetuously. "I—I'm going to tell you something—whether I ought to or not." He put both hands on her shoulders and looked down at her. "Sasha——"

Cutting off his declaration came a shrill, thin cry that sifted out from the gloom of the trees. They started and drew apart, turning startled eyes toward that shore

nearest the outer beach. Again came the sound, nearer, nearer, sharp and agonized from the cavernous shadows. Then, grotesquely into the dimly lighted spaces of the ice, staggered a small black creature. It hobbled a pace or two and fell. A moment later it raised itself and came on, only to fall again and lie still. With one accord Gary and the Girl skated toward it.

"A wounded fox," hazarded the man, speeding ahead of Sasha to ward off possible danger.

But the girl refused to be outdistanced. She reached the fox as soon as Gary and before he could prevent her, fell on her knees beside it, giving way to a startled cry of recognition.

"Why—Alexander! It's my Alexander!" her anguished voice rang out. "What's the matter with my little one?"

The blue fox looked up at his mistress with eyes that were glazed with pain. Then he dragged himself slowly erect, his great plummy tail sweeping the ice. He was standing on three legs. His right foreleg, a footless stump, was dripping darkly, forming a little pool below.

At Sasha's cry of pity and horror, Gary gathered the suffering animal tenderly in his arms, and began skating to the shore. . . .

An hour later Alexander, with bandaged leg, was lying on the couch before the fireplace, with all the members of the household, except Side-money, in sympathetic attendance. Gary's slight knowledge of surgery acquired during the war had enabled him to make the animal fairly comfortable.

He was carrying a basin of warm water back to the kitchen when Colonel Jeff waylaid him.

"My boy," the Colonel cast a cautious eye around to make sure they were alone, then, emphasizing his remarks with a forefinger tapping against Gary's chest he continued: "Don't mention this to Sasha, but it looks to me as if Alexander had been caught in a steel trap, and the plucky little devil has gnawed his foot off to get away. If so—it means but one thing, son. We've got poachers on the Island."

"Poachers—" the younger man was beginning, when the door opened and Sasha called:

"Nicolai is coming! I just heard the *Pup* at the float and saw the lights bobbing. He must be bringing news of Dad's steamer, for he said he'd pass the wireless station at Kodiak today." She ran back to the living-room.

"I'll talk to you about this later on, Gary," the Colonel whispered. "We'll ask Nick what he's heard about fox-pirates lately. He'll know."

Quick footsteps sounded on the porch and Sasha opened the door.

"Why Nicolai! What's the matter?" she cried as he came into the room. His face wore such a subdued and serious expression that the air was instantly charged with foreboding. "Has—has anything happened?"

Nick cleared his throat and looked nervously about him. "I just got in from Kodiak," he said. "The wireless picked up—well, you see they've been having a lot of fog along the southeastern coast lately," he went on, halting between the words. "They . . . Sasha—" he took a step toward her. "Sasha, the steamer your father is on is—sinking off Cape Yakatag!"

CHAPTER XVI

"STEAMER . . . sinking . . ." For a moment the words conveyed no meaning to Sasha's stunned consciousness. "Sinking . . ." she repeated dully.

Her father sinking off that lonely, glacier-walled coast, shunned even by the Indians! Her father's white head going down in the awful, blue-black sea that hurled itself eternally against the reefs of Cape Yakatag! She looked up with such a pale, shocked face that the Colonel started to hobble toward her. It served to break her stupor. She waved him away and her next words came in a pleading, pitiful tone that brought a mist to the old man's eyes. "My father shipwrecked—Oh, no, Nicolai. Oh, no, no——"

She stood holding tensely to her self-control while Nick told what information he had been able to obtain. He had gone to the wireless station, sixty miles away, to send a message when the news had come. The steamer *Northwestern*, southbound, was steaming full speed for the scene of the disaster, but the last radio-gram from the doomed ship reported it slipping off the reef where it had struck.

"Never fear, Sasha, they'll have time to launch the life-boats and get the passengers off," asserted the

Colonel with forced confidence, as he hobbled over to pat the girl's arm.

"But I must know! I must know tonight!" She went to the window and looked down to the float where the *Seal Pup's* lights glowed. "Nicolai, your launch is faster than mine. You shall take me to Kodiak tonight where I can get in touch with the *Northwestern*." She turned decisively to the trader. "I'll be ready in half an hour."

She was hurrying to the door of her room opening off the living-room, oblivious of everything but her father's peril, when she paused. There was the problem of Rocking Moon to consider. Impulsively she turned to look at Gary standing by the fireplace. Across the width of the room his gaze gripped hers as if he had taken her trembling hands in his firm, warm clasp. In his quiet voice came the answer to the question he read in her face.

"It's all right, Sasha. I'll look after the ranch while you're away." The two of them stood for a moment as if there were none but themselves in the room, a sight that tightened Nick's jaw muscles and set his eyes to smoldering.

Gary continued, with a quick unreadable glance in the direction of Side-money just entering from the rear: "Perhaps it might be well to send Feodor over from Rezanoff, even if he can't do much with his arm."

Sasha considered this. "Yes," she decided. "When Side-money takes feed to the feeding-stations to-morrow, he can run on over and get Feodor."

Preparations for Sasha's departure went on swiftly. Nick's news broke up the small family on Rocking Moon, for it was necessary to take the helpless old

Seenia to the village to stay with Feodor's mother during the two days Sasha expected to be absent; and Colonel Jeff, despite his rheumatism, insisted on accompanying the girl to Kodiak.

At midnight, just before the *Seal Pup* cast off from the float, Sasha handed Gary a list of the expected fox buyers. "If any of them come," she said, "tell them to return in a week's time."

She stepped over the railing of the *Pup* and a moment later the arrogant *put-put-put* punctured the cold brilliancy of the night as the launch shot away from the shore.

"Weather's going to cloud up. Smells like snow," Colonel Jeff addressed the wrapped figure that was Seenia, as he put coal into the tiny galley stove aboard the *Pup*. Then he called up to Sasha: "You'd better come down here and try to sleep until we get to town, my dear!" But the girl, standing in the bow of the boat, did not hear him, nor the anxious voice from the wheel-house where Nick stood.

With the steady soothing throb of the engine a queer numbness crept over Sasha. She did not feel the cold. She was not even conscious of having a thought. It was not until Windward Island lay behind under the stars that she became aware that Nicolai had left the wheel to the Colonel's care, and was standing by her side. He was silent, and she was grateful to him for being so. She found more comfort and assurance in his physical nearness, than she could have in any words he might speak. As the boat rocked beneath them, his tall figure swung into balance easily, surely. She knew that even now in this time of terrible anxiety, he was pleasantly alive to the speed of his

launch, to the rise and fall on the dim waves, and to his own mastery of this sea that drowned less daring men. She began to feel glad that she could turn over to him all the details of the arrangements at the village.

They reached Rezanoff to find that Feodor, whose arm was nearly well, had gone to a hamlet to the Westward in response to a rumor which he thought might lead to news of Zoya. But Sasha was not greatly concerned: Nicolai assured her he would send another man over to Rocking Moon to help Gary and Sidemoney—Nicolai attended to everything.

He did it with more than his customary dispatch, and scarcely an hour elapsed between the arrival of the *Seal Pup* at Rezanoff and the departure for Kodiak, even though he spent fifteen minutes talking earnestly to the engineer on one of his launches just in from Oo-koon.

As the *Pup* headed out across the long miles of open sea that lay between the two villages, Sasha, feeling in some way that it brought the wireless station nearer, went forward again as far as she could. She stood looking up at the sky where thin clouds were now sailing across patches of great Northern stars. Was it up there that souls went—up among the icy, glittering stars?

"I'm dreaming all this," she told herself. "I'm dreaming that Dad is shipwrecked and that I'm going to try and get word of him."

It was extraordinarily like a dream, this driving swiftly over the ground swells—huge, grey-green in the dim first hours of the morning; swells rolling in from the "sea of unshovell'd yet always ready graves!"

She shook her head to banish that gloomy line which had lodged in her mind at some long-ago reading. Even now she did not want to think of the ocean that way. The Larianoffs had always lived and dared upon the sea, and it had always proved a friend. Its storms had beaten upon their roofs, and tossed their ships, but none of them had met death because of it. On the contrary, the sea had given them food and riches. In this land where not a single roadway lined the contours of the hills, the ocean was the highway over which Larianoff men went out to adventure and romance and over which they came back again with marvelous tales of the world, with chests of books and music, beautiful cloth, and silver and linen. All the good things of life came to the Larianoffs by way of the sea. Could it turn against her now and bring death to her father, who loved the warmth and light of life, who loved people and the work he could do for them? Her father who was the last of the Larianoff men? As if the sea might answer her she turned her intent gaze on the unbroken swells that rolled away to the wan, gray dawn.

The immensity of the pelagic wilderness numbed her; but with a queer, detached attention to detail, she watched the glistening, gray-black hump of a whale rise and sink with clock-like regularity. . . . Snow began to sift down—tiny, almost imperceptible flakes that melted the instant they touched her cheeks. The whale was close under the lee now. It sank, its flukes slipping with a vast laziness into the cold waves . . . It rose again with a sonorous whistle, sending up a thin jet of vapor. She found a faint envy stirring in her heart because of the ease and certitude the creature

displayed in this ocean which could so easily snuff out a man's life. Then, gradually, in a way utterly without reason or logic, she began to feel that this tremendous, watery element was neither good nor bad. She began to see it as a great impersonal force that man might use for his benefit or for his destruction. For one ignorant of its laws, it proved a grave, but to him who loved it, who knew its laws and obeyed them, it could be the means of bearing him to safety, to happiness. The Larianoffs were such men. Her father was such a man. He, in his frail *bidarka*, had often plunged fearlessly through the vortex of a storm to take the last sacrament to a dying member of the Church. Could he not, when the ship slipped from the reef at Cape Yakatag, use his inborn and acquired knowledge of the sea to bring himself, as well as others, to safety?

This thought brought such a sense of comfort, of confidence, that when the dim morning light revealed the tall masts of the radio station pricking up from the forest, she had almost persuaded herself her father was safe.

As the *Seal Pup* chugged swiftly through the rock-bordered channel leading to the station dock, it began to snow in earnest—great heavy flakes that turned slowly as they came down to melt in the gray-green water. The launch made a landing and a few minutes later Sasha was walking through the dense atmosphere toward the blurred silhouettes of buildings, where faint, yellow squares marked the morning-lighted windows.

It continued to snow all during the anxious, dreary day at the Government station where they waited in

vain for more news from the *Northwestern*. The last message had announced its position fifty miles west of Cape Yakatag. Since then, though every radio station on the coast was sending out calls, so the operator assured them, there had been no response.

It was twelve hours after the arrival of the *Seal Pup* that the messages began to come through. Sasha, worn from wakefulness and anxiety, could hardly distinguish the words of the radiogram Nick handed her—a message, which if it had followed the ordinary course of transmittal in that part of the country, would have been sent by launch from Kodiak to her at Rocking Moon.

Gradually, from blurred type, the words that had ridden seven hundred miles of ether waves began to stand out clear, black:

ALL PASSENGERS SAFE AND WELL.
LANDED AT JUNEAU ON NORTHWESTERN.
WILL BE HOME NEXT STEAMER.

DAD

“Dad!” she repeated, holding the paper against her face. After the tension of the past hours, and the long contemplation of his possible death, the sight of that homely little word filled her with a surge of warmth and comfort. It radiated safety, cheerfulness, the old established order of happiness that was always present when her father was with her. “Dad!”

Thrusting the message into Colonel Jeff’s waiting hand she laid her head on her arms upon the table, and cried for the first time since the news of the wreck had reached her.

The Colonel, stricken with silence for the moment, leaned over and patted her clumsily.

Darkness had fallen, but Sasha, tired as she was, made ready to start for home immediately. Half an hour later, with her cap and coat on, she met Nicholas Nash as he came in from outdoors.

"When do we start, Nicolai?"

"Great Scott! Sasha, you don't expect to go home tonight, do you?" He looked at her in perturbed surprise. "Why, you must be dead for sleep—I know I am." He passed a lean brown hand over his eyes with a gesture that somehow lacked conviction because he had put in five hours of slumber in one of the operator's bunks that afternoon. Sasha, unaware of this, was all contrition.

"Oh, poor boy! I'm a selfish old thing not to remember that you've been up far longer than I. But Nicolai—" she came close, looking up eagerly into his heavy-lidded eyes as she patted his coat sleeves; "I'll take the wheel of the *Pup* tonight—it's stopped snowing and the stars are out, so I'll have no trouble. Besides, I can steer by the compass most of the way, and you can sleep until we get to Rocking Moon, if you want to. Please let's start now, Nick! Shall we? Oh, tonight I feel like racing over the sea to the end of the world, I'm so happy!" She stepped back and flung out her arms. "I'm so *happy*, Nicolai!" The movement of her head set the tassel on her cap dancing above her glowing amber eyes.

The trader looked at her for a long, contemplative moment. "W-e-l-l," he considered, drawing his watch from his pocket. "It's eight-thirty now." There was a hint of the sardonic in his smile when he nodded

and continued: "All right, Sasha. All right. This is not the first time you've kept me from sleeping, you little witch. We'll start for Rocking Moon—just as soon as I get the engine to turning over."

But the *Seal Pup's* engine chose this time, apparently, to exhibit temperament. It refused to "turn over" despite the muttered encouragement—or disparagement of Nash working away on the other side of the thin partition that separated him from the tiny cabin where Sasha and the Colonel were established. That the perfect mechanism of the *Pup* should refuse to work was a distinct surprise to both of them.

After a while the girl grew sleepy and curled herself up in the top bunk while Colonel Jeff, after making a roaring fire in the galley stove, put on a pot of coffee. The last thing Sasha remembered, as she drowsily pulled a robe over her, was the aroma of boiling coffee and the asthmatic, ineffectual cough of the engine.

When she woke, the steady vibration and the rocking told her that the launch was under way. She leaned her tousled head over the edge of the bunk. The clock ticked loudly that it was an hour after midnight. From the bunk below came the Colonel's gentle snore, an accompaniment to the faint *creak-creak* of the steering gear.

Descending cautiously so as not to awaken the sleeper, she stepped up into the darkened wheel-house where Nick stood, a tall, slim silhouette against the dim light beyond the open window. Fresh, cool air from illimitable stretches of ocean drifted past him, and his hands rested lightly on the wheel as he watched the *Seal Pup's* prow lift and fall on long, slow swells

glimmering like polished onyx under the light of Northern stars.

"Oh, Nick! Why didn't you wake me when we started?" She pictured him standing there alone during the long hours when, if it had not been for her desire to reach home, he might have been sleeping comfortably at the radio station.

He turned toward her.

"Hello, there, Sasha!" His cheerful greeting surprised the girl, for the Nicolai she had known all her life was apt to be sulky after condescending to do the thing he did not want to do. His manner now enhanced his action immeasurably, forcing her to feel a sense of gratitude all out of proportion to the value of it. No one knew this better than Sasha, and though she was provoked at herself, there was more than a hint of compunction in her manner as she impulsively laid her warm, supple hands over his larger ones that grasped the spokes of the wheel.

"I'm quarter-master now, Nick." She shoved him gently aside. "You go and lie down, please. I feel like a wretch, making you travel all night like this."

He looked down at her as if he found her lovable but absurd in her attempt to do a man's work for him. Then with one hand he caught both her wrists.

"Slap! Slap!" he said with mock ferocity, administering two quick strokes on her palms. "Don't you know people get put in irons for trying to run a ship against the captain's orders?" Then he continued in his natural tones; "But I'll tell you what you *can* do, Sasha. You can stay here and talk to me. We've got a long run ahead of us, as I didn't get away from

the station until half an hour ago. The engine—but let's forget it. Here—let me fix this stool for you to sit on." He moved the high seat over to his companion. "Gee! but this is great, Sasha!" he exclaimed, after she had perched herself upon it. "It's about the only time within the memory of man that you haven't either been fighting with me, or badgering me!"

Sasha laughed happily. Now that her mind was at ease about her father, she was keenly alive to the magic of the night, the easy, undulating movement of the launch under the waves, and Nick's astonishing, cheerful kindliness. For the first time since she had repulsed his rough advances that August day by the Lookout tower, she became herself with him.

After a while they drifted into talk of her father and the wreck; of the old days when Nick's grandfather on his mother's side had been a commander in the Russian fleet of commerce, and Sasha's had eloped with a captain's daughter at Sitka. They talked of Alaskan things—of their homeland, which both knew so well; things that the girl loved wholeheartedly, but that Nick regarded with an affection which was divided and tinged with scorn for the provincial.

As they talked in the dim wheel-house Nick's thoughts went South again to a far city which he idealized now because of his absence from it. He told Sasha of its charm, its wealth, the beauty of its women, and tonight the girl listened with wide, wondering eyes. He liked to tell Sasha about the world—when she was sweet and attentive. Though in his ill-natured moods he often said things to her which

carried a hint of scornful pity because she had never been out of Alaska, secretly he was pleased to have her know so little of the land to the South. To his mind a girl—the girl who was to be Mrs. Nicholas Nash—should know nothing of it outside of that he himself wished to tell her or to show her. It made him feel more masterful, and there were few times when Sasha allowed him to feel so in her presence—Sasha, with her banter, and her impudent, piquant little ways.

Nicholas Nash, of the ardent, short-lived emotions, could never remain in love with a woman he saw every day, yet he believed, for the time being at least, that he could never tire of Sasha. But—if the golden glamour did fade after possession, she still had that inherent cleanness, that vigor and freedom of the North that would always appeal to him. And she would be the beautiful mistress of his home and the mother of his children. These were the comforts of a sated old age that Nicolai looked forward to across a delirious whirl of wild and pleasurable years.

"Poor fellow!" Sasha knew nothing of these mental processes, but she laughed sympathetically after he had finished a tale of San Francisco. "You're always wanting to be where you are not and longing for the things you can't have, Nick!"

"But I *can* have you, Sasha!"

One step from the wheel brought him against the high stool on which she sat. She became aware of a faint aroma of clean wool and expensive cigarettes. In the dusk his face was close to hers, and for the first time in her life she felt the magnetic quality of his somnolent eyes. There was a startled moment

when she found herself unable to look away, a moment when the compelling power of him drew her body involuntarily. Slight as the movement was, the man saw it and his caution burst all bonds. Leaving the launch to drift where it would, he caught her to him and buried his face in her wind-blown hair.

For an instant astonishment held the girl passive, then she roused to struggling indignation.

"Nick—let me go—How dare you, Nick——"

The words were smothered on her lips by the man's warm mouth. All restraint had fled from him now. Sasha knew a throb of fear mingled strangely with a flaming sense of his nearness. This Nick was foreign to her—a Nick beyond reasoning, driven mad with the desire he had crushed for months. The Nick who had embraced her against her will on the Lookout last August was but a crude impetuous boy beside this man. His voice was thick, shaking to a passion she had never heard before.

"Sasha, you little devil—you elusive little devil—I tell you I'm crazy for you! By God, you're mine! I've wanted you all my life!" His clasp tightened and blindly his mouth again sought hers.

Blazing-eyed, she twisted her face away, her voice assuming a cool scorn contradicted by the wild beating of her heart; her hands pressing him off with all her strength.

"And I think I've hated you all my life!" she retorted furiously.

"I'd rather have you hate me than laugh at me, as you always have!" he was returning, when the girl found herself released so violently that she staggered and Nick had barely stepped to the wheel again when

she heard the fumbling his quick ear had caught before, and Colonel Jeff poked his head around the door jamb.

"How's she heading, Cap?" he asked cheerily. "Rocking Moon ought to be showing up pretty soon, eh?"

There was a long moment of silence before Nick's surly voice replied:

"Not yet a while. I'm cutting through the channel to Rezanoff first."

"Great Mahogany Ghost, Nick!" the Colonel shouted, glaring over his glasses. "What kind of a trick is that? Rocking Moon is fifteen miles this side of Rezanoff! By the lord, *I* want to get home and rub some oil of wintergreen on this confounded leg of mine!"

"Sorry, Colonel." Sasha alone understood the curt-ness of the other's voice. "Should have told me sooner. We're going to run in and have a bite of breakfast with Feodor's mother, pick up Seenia, and be on our way again."

The blundering Colonel, never guessing how inopportune had been his appearance, stared at the man at the wheel with open mouth.

Sasha would not turn around. She treated Nick to a view of her back while she looked angrily over the dim sea trying to still the beating of her heart. If Nick Nash thought she was going to beg him to take her straight home, he was vastly mistaken, she told herself, and she told herself, too, that she hated him for the way he had forgotten himself just now. But even as she thought it her blood tingled again to the rough impetuosity of his embrace. It was this very

savagery, this masterful barbarism which formed much of Nick's charm for women.

There must have been some hint of the tension in the air, for the Colonel, after a long stare, withdrew with offended precision. Then Sasha heard a step behind her and though she did not turn, nor did he lay a hand on her, she knew that Nick was close by her.

"Sasha—*lubimaya*—" his voice was low and pleading, yet still filled with the deeper timbre it had known a few minutes before, "Sasha—I forgot myself. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done it, but—My God, Sasha, do you realize how I love you!"

She would have been less than woman if she could have withstood that. In a stiff little voice she answered him, and under the gradually warming friendliness they headed in across the Harbor of Rezanoff.

In the dim morning light the rolling white hills drew nearer, and the houses of the village gradually came forth as if an artist's invisible hand were touching them in against the soft, snowy background:—the dark bold strokes that were the wharf and weed-grown piles; the dull ivory and mauve smudged in to form the hewed-log walls under thick roofs of snow squared about the edges; the straight lines of blue smoke drifting up from the blurred scarlet of brick chimneys; the jade domes of the Church rounding from the highest white knoll; and, as if to accentuate the picture, the squares of dim orange here and there that were lighted windows.

There were several launches lying at the dock. From the open hatches and doors of the cabins breakfast savors of frying bacon and bubbling coffee

came out on the cold, fresh air. One of Nick's launches was in from Oo-koon and as he made a landing a hairy fellow, with uncombed head, bobbed up out of the hatchway to give him greeting.

It was quite daylight when the *Seal Pup*, with Seenia in the cabin, left for Rocking Moon. When the launch was moving away from the wharf Nick turned the wheel over to Sasha and stepped to the doorway of the wheel-house.

"I'll be over to Oo-koon tonight," he called a last word to the dark-browed fellow standing on the after-deck of his fox-island launch. "And in the meantime—" he made a motion with his hand—"you know what to do."

The *Pup* shot out over the bay, Sasha guiding it. Though she had been gone from home not quite thirty-six hours, it seemed like a month. She wondered how Alexander's maimed leg was getting on. Then her mind became busy planning improvements to be made at the ranch when she sold her foxes—a new engine for the *Simmie and Ann*; comforts for her father's room; new hangings for the living-room. Had any of the fox buyers arrived, she wondered, and if so, how had Gary handled them? She was glad to forget Nick in her thoughts of Gary. She visualized him now—the deep gray of his black-lashed eyes set close to his straight dark brows, and his way of looking down while he listened to her, a slow smile growing on his lips. She smiled at his boyish habit of bringing her wild flowers done into tight little bunches without a single redeeming green leaf, holding them close up under the blossoms. Her artistic soul stood aghast at the arrangement, but her heart always flooded with

warmth for him as she accepted them. She liked his manner with Colonel Jeff and Seenia, and the way he sat on the front steps with Alexander, his arm over the fox's back, his eyes quiet and introspective, looking out across the bay. Of course, he was by no means a perfect man—nor did she want him to be. He was moody at times, and thoroughly proficient in profanity, as she had ascertained once when she came upon him unawares while he labored at the engine of the *Simmie and Ann*. And though totally unmusical, his appreciation of music led him to sit down at the piano sometimes just when she wanted to read, and patiently, thoroughly and with maddening slowness, poke out an air from some obscure opera. She pictured him now, long legs wound backward about the base of the piano stool, dark head bent and one hand poised above the keyboard as he pursued his one-finger method. And once he had come back from Rezanoff with a black eye, the result of forcibly recovering the *Simmie and Ann's* skiff which had been spirited away by a light-fingered Swede fisherman.

She liked the hint of gray in his thick, black hair. Gary was like Nicolai, in that he was deep-chested, strong-limbed and possessed of untiring energy, yet Sasha always felt that he was not of the breed of men who delight primarily in action. He could enjoy gaiety and adventure without himself playing the leading part. She felt in him a spirit of detachment, as if he stood to one side, as it were, and watched life go by, and thought about it. She found this singularly restful after Nicolai's capably insolent way of dashing into things, utterly unable to see anyone's viewpoint but his own. If life were all high moments,

Nick could be a hero, because he plunged into every situation with little thought. Nick did things with the sweeping gesture, one eye always on the grandstand. But Gary—she wondered how he would meet the hazards of the North—if he stayed.

Engrossed in her meditations Sasha guided the *Seal Pup* through the maze of little islands that lay between Rezanoff and Rocking Moon. The sun was silvering the blue of the water and striking crystal radiances from the snow-laden spruce trees along the shore. She took a keen delight in standing back of the wheel, balancing herself to the tilt of the deck, feeling the vibration, watching the bow swing to her touch. Presently this pleasure became more engaging than her thoughts, and because the water was deep everywhere, she began making little experiments to see how quickly the *Pup* responded to its helm.

Nick came from the cabin and made his way to the bow of the boat, where he stood like a figure-head, lazily scanning the shores on each side. The launch, obedient to a turn of the wheel, swung wider than usual and before Sasha could bring back, Nick turned and came striding along the deck into the wheel-house. He reached for the control of the engine and slowed it down.

"Sasha, look in that little cove to the right. Isn't that the *Simmie and Ann*?"

"It is! What in the world is she doing anchored in there so far from home!" Sasha, puzzled, swung the *Pup* toward the other launch and in a few minutes was alongside.

There was no sign of life aboard the anchored craft. No one appeared in answer to Nick's shouts. The

wheel-house was empty; the doors all closed, and no smoke came from the short black pipe that protruded from the snowy top of the cabin.

"Oh, Side-money!" called the trader for the second time. "Tynan!"

Silence answered.

Both Nick and Sasha sprang aboard the *Simmie and Ann* and disappeared just as Colonel Jeff stuck his head out of the *Pup's* cabin door.

A few minutes later the girl came up alone onto the trampled snow of the *Simmie's* deck. Alarmed, her eyes once more swept the craft, and came back to rest on the Colonel's anxious face.

"Colonel Jeff," she said, "there isn't a soul on board."

CHAPTER XVII

NICK followed the girl to the deck of the *Simmie and Ann* almost immediately and stood wiping his hands on a piece of waste.

"Engine trouble," he announced briefly, as he tossed the waste overboard. "The *Simmie and Ann's* been bucking again, and the blamed fool who had her out has been tinkering with the thing until the parts are scattered all over. But he can't have been gone so very long, because there are still some embers left in the galley stove."

"Oh!" Sasha's expression was one of relief.

"Well," put in the Colonel testily, "this has all the earmarks of Side-money's work. I suppose he's taken the skiff and rowed home. Gary knows that engine like a mother knows her babe. He can always make her come to time."

"We might as well take her into the ranch, then, I reckon." Nick, with his air of capability, was already stepping about the snow-covered deck getting ready a tow-line.

A quarter of an hour later both launches, with the tow-rope tightening and slackening between them, were slipping over the smooth ground swells headed toward Rocking Moon. Intermittent breaths of cold wind crisped darting purple lines over the water, lines which zigzagged past them, leaving the sea glinting silver

again under the wintry sun. It was not long before Sasha, at the wheel of the *Pup*, sighted a small dark object rising and falling on the waves ahead of them. As she drew near it, this proved to be a skiff with Side-money, in mackinaw and fur cap, rowing mightily.

"By gosh, I'm glad to see you folks!" he burst out, as his stubby hands grasped the guard rail of the *Pup*. "I'm about tuckered out with them dummed oars—" He stood up on the deck and stamped his feet, his eyes roving over the launch. "Why—where's Nash?" he demanded suddenly.

"Back there steering the *Simmie and Ann*—can't you see?" Colonel Jeff cast a brief disparaging glance at the man.

"Here—you!" At that moment Nick from the towed launch, hailed Side-money in a peremptory voice that made the helper deaf to Sasha's inquiries.

"Haul away there on the tow-line! I want to talk to you!" ordered the trader. The man complied, putting off the Colonel's rapid questions with grunts and "Wait till I get this in, Colonel. Just hold your horses a minute, can't you?"

Nick leaped aboard, and plunged into the situation at once.

"What happened to you, man?" he demanded. "Can't you run a launch without laying it up for repairs?"

Side-money shot an oblique glance at Nick's scowling face. His own hairy countenance assumed an injured expression.

"That's right," he said plaintively. "Go after *me*. Put all the blame on *me*. I'm the fall guy, I am. Just as if *I* wanted the engine to go dead on me in the mid-

dle of a snow storm,—me floating about helpless on the bloody Pacific Ocean. Me living on fox grub, too, and nothing but snow-water to——”

“How long have you been gone from Rocking Moon, Side-money?” Sharply the Colonel cut off his jeremiad.

“Gosh, I don’t know. I ain’t got no watch. All I know is that I left about noon of the day you all started for Kodiak——”

“Nearly twenty-four hours!” broke in Sasha. “Why, Side-money—then you never went to Rezanoff for an extra man—and Gary has been alone on the Island all this time?”

“I didn’t go nowheres, m’am—leastways, I don’t know where I got. You see I starts out to feed the foxes, and was going to get Feodor, like you told me, and it was snowing thicker than hair on a dog’s back, and the engine peters out on me and I drifts about—lord, I don’t know how long, and then she quits snowing and I finds myself next to some land with everything covered with snow—trees, rocks, ground, *everything!* Gosh, I don’t know where I am! I ain’t never been in this part of the country when it snowed. Well, the tide drifts me into that little cove where you found the *Simmie*, and then I starts to work on the engine again.”

“Yes, you certainly did,” snorted Nick.

The man ignored the interruption.

“But I never gets a wheeze out of her. I could have fixed her up all right, but the coal gives out for the galley stove, and with this cold weather coming on I figured I’d better be rowing someplace. So I starts out thinking I’d strike a fishboat, or maybe a place

where I could get my bearings. Believe me, I'll never take a launch out again with no grub aboard!"

"And my foxes on the outer beach have been without food?" Sasha's voice was indignant.

"Oh, no, m'am. I put feed in the traps all right. It was only when I started for Rezanoff that I got lost."

The girl turned with an impatient gesture. "Come, let's hurry home, Nicolai. I'm—I'm worried."

"All right, Side-money, you take the wheel of the *Simmie*. I'll stay here."

A few minutes later they were again under way. Nick steered the *Seal Pup* now, and Sasha, with her elbows on the narrow sill, dropped her chin in her hands and looked thoughtfully ahead. A vague presentiment of more trouble was taking life in her mind. How had Gary managed alone on the Island?

Strong and trustworthy she believed him to be, but yet—at the back of her consciousness there now spoke the faintest voice of uncertainty. Hers was the Alaskan's attitude toward the capability of the cheechako, who has not yet had the opportunity of proving himself able to battle successfully with the North. It was a hitherto unconscious reservation which kept her from whole-heartedly depending on Gary—and she wanted to depend on him. She tried to banish the feeling by telling herself that he had "roughed it" in many countries of the world. He had read and traveled more than anyone she had ever known. Still—she could not rid herself of the idea that he was primarily a "city man." Attractive as he was in every other way, she knew that in the hazards of the North she would trust to her own judgment rather than his. She would

even trust to the judgment of Nicholas Nash, wild and reckless though she knew him to be.

These thoughts weighed on her. She told herself she was not in love with Gary but—she never allowed herself to think of the time when he should be gone from Rocking Moon.

Behind her Nick put the wheel over and she roused herself to find that the *Seal Pup* was snorting into the little home bay. Her eyes swept the waters ahead. The float lay barren and white on the sparkling blue. She could see a path shoveled out through the snow leading up to the house, which was wearing its white roof like a new turban. The forest behind was white too, except for dark green patches where the snow had fallen from the pendant branches. She expected any moment to see Gary run out on the veranda and down to the float.

But as the *Pup* drew nearer to the shore she became aware of a queer inactivity in the scene before her. No smoke rose from the wide red chimney of the ranch-house, nor from that of the barn. There was no sign of life anywhere.

When the two launches had been brought alongside the float and still no one had come down, Sasha's apprehension had grown into alarm. While Nick and Side-money assisted the Colonel and Seenia to the house, she ran ahead, her boots crunching the snowy path.

She stood on the veranda and called, a questioning note in her voice:

"Gary! . . . Gary! . . . We're home!"

There was no answer.

She turned the knob of the door and entered the

living-room. It was cold and deserted. After she had gone calling up and down stairs, she convinced herself that he was not in the house.

"Gary must be at the barn, or over on the other side of the Island," she told the others, as they came in the door. "Br-r-r-r! It's cold in here. Side-money, build up the fires, please." She drew out Seenia's chair and shook up the pillows before she established the old woman in it. "I'll be back in a few minutes, Seenia. I'm going to run out to the barn."

The bare branches of the alder grove were creaking in the rising wind as she hurried through them, but otherwise it was strangely still everywhere about the ranch. Not even a fox yelped from the corral. As she swung open the heavy barn door she wondered where Gary had put the wounded Alexander.

"Ga-r-y!" she called, and with her head on one side stood listening a moment before she advanced into the dusky interior. There was no sound.

When she stepped inside she was met by the pungent, homely smells of hay, the cow, and fox-food. She paused while the two great salmon vats took shape for her eyes that were filled with the brightness of snow and water, and the vague mass in the corner resolved itself into the brick stove where fox-food was cooked in a huge, imbedded iron kettle. She had never known it to be so still in the barn. Even the cow, who had large winter quarters on the other side of the partition, was quiet.

Just as she was turning to leave a movement in the darkest corner drew her attention; then, low in a bed of straw something heaved, broke in two and part of it advanced in her direction.

"Why, hello, Sampson!" Sasha exclaimed fondly.

The little animal, grotesque in his "outfit," tiptoed toward her on incredibly skinny legs and she caught him up in her arms. "What's the funny little thing doing with his overcoat all askew—" An impatient bark from the corner interrupted her. "Oh, my poor Alexander!" She ran to the straw where Alex stood waiting, his bandaged leg held out stiffly. The fox looked up with shining eyes, whining and letting out soft yelps of delight at her return. She sat down beside him, with the wriggling Sampson in her lap, while her favorite nuzzled his head contentedly under her chin.

Alex's actions convinced Sasha that his wounded leg was healing without complication and for a few minutes she cuddled both affectionate creatures, laughing and murmuring endearments into their soft ears, before she settled them again upon the straw. She was closing the barn door on them when Nick's call came to her from the veranda.

"Just a minute, Nicolai. I'll be there in a minute!" she answered, with a backward wave of her hand as she hurried over the trampled snow, her eyes seeking the corral.

None of her foxes were visible through the wire meshes of the enclosure. A queer chill swept over her as she shot the bolt on the door and went inside. For a moment she stood looking across the soiled snow; then in a panic she darted toward the wooden dens at the back of the corral.

Every den was empty!

She felt suddenly and deathly ill. "Oh-o-o . . . Oh-o-o . . ." her voice came in whispered gasps as her

unbelieving eyes again swept along the row of vacant dens. She did not see Nick standing in the doorway of the corral watching her. His face was as pale as her own, and it wore a strange look of mingled fear and compassion as he covered the distance between them.

Hesitatingly he laid a hand on her shoulder. "Sasha . . . Sasha . . ."

The girl breathed deeply, steadying herself. When she looked up there was a mist in her eyes and her chin quivered.

"They're gone, Nicolai . . . stolen." The words came quietly, but they were weighted with the crushing consciousness of disaster. A moment later, however, she squared her shoulders and spoke as the daughter of a race that considers it unsportsmanlike to dwell on financial loss. "But—but . . . I have still sixty foxes left on the other side of the island."

Not until the news had been broken to the Colonel was Gary Tynan mentioned. Side-money, standing by the mantel uneasily fingering one of his painted shells, was questioned, but could add nothing to his story already told on the launch. Colonel Jeff, with pursed lips and frowning brows, sat thinking, while Nick paced up and down the living-room, volubly planning the arrangement of his affairs so that he could go to Kodiak and report the theft to the nearest marshal.

"But Tynan ought to be here somewhere," he asserted in a tone that showed he refused to consider any other possibility. "He must have put up some sort of a fight to protect your property, Sasha, and in that case the pirates would have bound him and put him out of business until they finished their work.

Side-money, we'll go out to the barn and make a thorough search."

Side-money, after one of his quick, oblique glances at the trader, made for the back door.

Sasha watched the two men hurrying through the grove toward the barn to begin their search for Gary Tynan. While she waited for their return she fixed unseeing eyes on the gray wintry branches of the alders. She would not allow herself to think of possible danger to Gary, nor of the fifty stolen foxes that represented two years of sacrifice and hard work. Instead her thoughts went to the fox colonies on the outer beach of the Island, where, she estimated, she must have sixty animals left—fifty of which she had planned to keep for her own increase. But now . . . there was no other way out of it; she must sell them to pay her debts—the money borrowed from Nicolai, and the bills contracted for supplies at his store. Even then she would still be in his debt. She could not sell all her foxes—she must keep at least five pairs, including Alexander, if she would go on with her business. And she must go on.

Her heart sank as she contemplated beginning where she had begun two years ago. Just when she thought she should be free and financially independent, she must go back to the old ways of rigid economy; the buying on credit at the store; the burdening sense of her obligation to Nicolai. For a frightened moment she nearly lost faith in herself, and like many another woman venturing alone on the sea of business, longed poignantly for some man to whom she could turn over the wheel of her responsibilities. This instant of weakness was put to rout by her innate common sense, and she sternly

forced herself to consider what she had left to go on with. When Nicolai came in from the barn, she would accompany him and Side-money to the various feeding-stations. The traps must have been sprung hours ago, and the imprisoned foxes would now be undergoing discomfort in their narrow quarters.

As she thought, her eye noted the movement of the bare alders. The wind was rising, indicating a blow—one of the clear, cold kind that made the sea a bitter way to travel in winter.

Through the intersected branches she saw Nick and Side-money come out of the barn and pause uncertainly. Their figures were not clear but from the gesticulating of Nicolai's hands it was plain that he was disturbed, angry. Perhaps he was berating Side-money for leaving Gary alone on the Island. Sasha felt grateful to Nick for his whole-hearted sympathy in her misfortune, and somewhat surprised, also. He had never approved of her attempt at fox farming, and never before had she known him to have any sympathy with failure.

As he and Side-money came through the alders toward the house, Nick looked up at her window. He shook his head. He had not found Gary. Sasha had never seen him look so troubled.

Half an hour later the *Seal Pup* was on its way to the feeding-stations with Sasha and the two men on board. The cold wind had blown thin gashes of white across the blue of the sea and as the launch shot forward wavelets hit against the bow with vigorous, slapping sounds. Rounding Lampadny Point they ran into a flock of black sea-birds bobbing and rocking on the water. These scattered with fast beating wings, drag-

ging their fat bodies along the wave-crests. Sasha stood in the wheel-house and with the binoculars swept the shores of Rocking Moon in the hope that she might see Gary.

The low rolling dunes of the Point were covered with snow and an occasional tree stood out black-green against the white, like a pen and ink drawing. The glasses brought the tomb of Father Paul close with such suddenness that Sasha exclaimed involuntarily.

"Look, Nick!" she cried a second later. "There's a trail through the snow and it seems as if an army of people had been tramping about the tomb!"

The trader grasped the glasses and trained them on the great, three-barred cross. "By George, you're right, Sasha. Some one's been ashore there within the last twenty-four hours."

Side-money also had seen the trampled snow, for he walked hurriedly toward the bow and stood braced to the wind, the ear-laps of his cap fluttering about his face. He turned to look toward the wheel-house, and Nick motioned him inside.

"We'll go in closer and anchor, Side-money. You stay aboard. Sasha and I are going ashore to see what's up there."

The man's mouth fell open. "Gosh-a-mighty!" he exclaimed. "What'cha want to do that for? It's breezing up and we ought to get the feeding over as soon as we can. It's getting lumpy out here a'ready," he added, indicating the chop splashing against the boat.

Nick paid no attention, but slowed the *Pup's* engine. "Get for'ard and throw the hook!" he ordered.

Side-money, with displeasure written large on his

broad face, tossed the light anchor overboard, and a few minutes later stood watching the tiny skiff spank the water as Nick's powerful strokes sent it shoreward.

When the bow squashed into the sand, Sasha sprang out. While Nick arranged the oars and drew the little craft up on the beach she ran ahead along the path already made in the snow. Without waiting for him to assist her she scrambled to the top of the tomb and when he came up, she was opening the glass door of the *lampada*.

"Someone's had this new lamp burning, Nick. The wick is charred and the oil is gone. I wonder who put the horrid, reflecting thing here. Someway, I've never felt right about it. I'm not superstitious, but it seems as if all my bad luck began when Father Paul's old lamp was taken away."

"Nonsense, Sasha." Nick took the new lamp from her.

"Anyway, while we're here, I'm going to put the other one back, Nicolai. Before the snow came I saw it lying close to the end wall." She paused thoughtfully. "Whoever was here, came after we left the Island to go to Kodiak. There was no snow when we left, you remember."

Nick nodded, a frown drawing his light, clean-cut eyebrows together. "Yes, I said they must have come ashore within the last twenty-four hours," he reminded her.

"You hold the lamp till I hop down. Oh . . ." she pressed a meditative finger against her lower lip. "We don't need to leave the thing to rust in the snow, Nick. There's a loose log at the end of the tomb—Seenia

showed it to me years ago. It swings in on a hinge. We'll put the lamp in there."

They descended and began pressing against one log after another in the end wall. Nick found the right one at last and it swung slowly in under his strength. "It's strange you never told me about this before, Sasha," he began as he thrust his head in the narrow opening. "I—Good Lord! Some one's using this place for a cache!"

He pushed the log farther back and scrambled in, followed closely by the astonished girl. It was true; as the yellow eye of his pocket flash-light played about it revealed a bundle and a pile of gunny-sacks in the middle of the sandy floor.

Nick knelt down and began lifting the loose sacks. They were stained and damp, and used evidently as a covering for something that lay beneath. The something proved to be a board and two small steel traps.

"Fox traps!" they exclaimed in unison.

"Yes, and a stretcher for the skins, too, Sasha. Some snide outfit has been setting steel traps along the beach and using these sacks to carry home the catch—or to carry it here—that's why they're blood-stained. By George, that's what happened to Alexander!" Nick's voice was vibrant with honest indignation. "They, or he, rather, for anyone can see it's a one-man job by the meagerness of the outfit, he's been using this place for a skinning shed. The sacrilegious hound!" Nick snapped a trap viciously as if he were mentally closing it on the neck of its owner. "Pass over that bundle, Sasha."

With a dizzy sensation of helplessness Sasha put out her foot and shoved the roll along the sand toward

Nicolai. He was so engrossed in his recent discoveries that he seemed hardly aware of her as he thrust the flash-light into her hand with a request that she hold it. He unwrapped the oil-cloth cover and the package unrolled with a soft crackling sound, disclosing the dried, pale surfaces of two fox skins turned fur side in.

"Oh . . . Nick. . . ." Sasha's voice quavered as she caught up the pelts. "Think of it—my Blues in a steel trap!"

"The scoundrel! the petty low-down sneak! One stretcher—" Nick held up the board in wrathful disgust. "Come on, dear—" he looked at her for the first time as if he realized that this was primarily her affair and not his. "Come. Let's get out of here. I left word for Feodor to come over this afternoon, and when he gets here, we'll put him on guard to nail this thieving dog!" He rose to a stooping position, tucking the two skins under his arm. "Let me take the light, Sasha. You go ahead."

He flashed the light about the small chamber and stooped to pick up something from the sand. His fingers closed over it as he stepped out into the windy sunshine. After his cramped position in the tomb he straightened his tall figure slowly. A second later he was staring incredulously at the thing in his hand.

"Good—God!" he ejaculated.

With a quick, unceremonious movement Sasha drew his palm low enough so that she could see what lay there. Then the snowy world and the blue sky blended in a sickening whirl.

It was Gary Tynan's battered old wrist watch.

CHAPTER XVIII

NICK'S discoveries in the tomb had wrought him to a high pitch of excitement.

"By George!" he ejaculated, with a determined movement of his fist. "I've got to figure this thing out! I've got to find where that fellow Tynan has gone!" So intent was he on his thoughts that he seemed hardly conscious of Sasha, who followed blindly in his footsteps to the skiff. His lean, long face sharpened and his eyes took on their old smoldering look as he rowed back to the *Seal Pup*.

Side-money was standing in the bow watching them through the glasses. When he helped Sasha aboard his quick, black eyes darted from her to Nick and back again. He seemed feverishly eager to know what they had found at the tomb, but Nick, telling him as little as possible, set him to steering the launch toward the nearest feeding-station.

When the first stop was made, Sasha, still dazed, went ashore with the two men. She followed them up the snowy little gully to the top of the bank while memory painted on the background of her misery that August evening when she had first led Gary Tynan to the station and had shown him how to bait a fox trap. Could he have been planning, even then, to take advantage of his position on Rocking Moon? Answer-

ing her thought came a mental picture of him as he stood, slim and tall under the spruce trees, listening to her. Always when she thought of him, it was the expression of his eyes that she remembered vividly—his black-lashed eyes that were so gray—and honest. Something kept trying to tell her they were honest eyes—yet there was his watch, and the steel traps and the pelts! And his absence . . . She stood lost in a maze of confused ideas oblivious to her surroundings until Nick's voice called her back to the present.

"Sasha—" he came tramping through the snow toward her. "I'm afraid it's more bad luck, *milaya*," he began hesitatingly. "There—there isn't a single fox track about the station—and the food in every trap here is untouched. Not a door has been sprung——"

She moved back a step, looking at him as if trying to comprehend the import of his words. Then her shoulders sagged and her head fell forward on her bosom. Nick, as if he could not bear to witness her anguish, glanced quickly to where the cold, dark sea was crisping about the bobbing launch. Without speaking the girl turned and made her way toward the skiff, her head bent to the wind that fluttered her white scarf about her.

The trader watched the lonely little figure stumbling along the edge of the whitening surf. His hands fell clenched to his sides, his brows drew together. In his expression was pity, together with a strange indecision. He started impulsively forward as if to call her.

"Easy there, Nash. Soft stuff don't get you nowhere." Side-money swung his feed-cans from the snowy top of a trap.

Nick turned on him with the quick viciousness of a huskie: "Shut up, damn you!" he snarled.

The man shrugged his shoulders under the yoke that held the buckets, and started off down the gully to the row-boat, where Sasha was now sitting, her head bowed in her hands. Nick plunged his fists into his trousers pockets, hesitated, and then, with an air of decision, followed the others.

As the other stations were visited, Sasha stayed aboard the launch, but with each return from the shore the report was the same. Two foxes were trapped at one station, but all the other traps were empty and un sprung, with the food untouched and not a track near them. Where there should have been at least sixty animals at large on the Island, this seemed incredible. It meant but one thing—the fox pirates had not only taken those animals in the corral, but somehow they had managed to steal all the stock Sasha was keeping for herself.

Tossing like a cork on the rising chop of the sea, the *Seal Pup* headed for the ranch-house. Sasha stood with her face pressed against the window of the wheel-house, numbed by the disclosures of the last two hours. When the launch stopped she stepped mechanically to the float.

"You tell the Colonel what has happened, Nicolai," she said wearily. "I—I'm going upstairs to Dad's room. I want to think."

She lay on her father's bed unable to formulate any plan for the future, while slowly the realization of financial ruin took possession of her. Everything on which she had depended was gone. Crushed, helpless, she was adrift on a sea of disaster, blown hither and

thither by the malignant winds of Fate. She and her father and old Seenia. Feodor and the Colonel, too, for both these friends had given her their services, expecting to be paid only when she sold her first foxes. They'd had no money for a year. A moan escaped her when she thought of what she owed them—and she was worse than penniless. They were all penniless—and at the worst season of the year, when there was no work done in or about Rezanoff; no work until the fishing-season opened next April! Like a wild fox in a pen her mind darted from one wall of ruin to another, searching vainly for a way out of her trouble. She could find none. And—there was Gary. Could it be that he was responsible for her disaster?

The rising wind whined through her misery, and after a while she became aware that the Colonel's crutches were thumping up the stairs. Then she heard Nicolai's voice, and presently both men, talking in low tones, passed along the hall to Gary's room. She could hear them moving about in it, and like a nauseating chill, came the conviction that they were searching his belongings as if he were indeed a criminal.

She rose wearily, brushing her hair back from her forehead, and went out into the hall. The door of Gary's room was open, framing the interior like a picture—the bed, smooth, undisturbed under the snowy light of the window above it; the little reading table with a history of the Northwest, and a government report on fox-raising lying beside the lamp; the Colonel seated before the larger table which served Gary as a desk, and Nicolai opposite him, leaning over some papers which engrossed them both.

"By the lord, I can't believe it! *I can't believe it!*"

Colonel Jeff was repeating, as he scanned first one paper and then another. Nick was silent, but his face still wore its puzzled look—an expression Sasha had never seen there before. His swift upward glance found her standing in the doorway.

"Come in, Sasha, and look at this," he invited, pointing to the disarranged mass of papers on the desk. "Found them up there behind that rafter—" he indicated one of the large, peeled logs that ridged the sloping roof of the room. "See this map?" he handed her a tracing on a large piece of wrapping paper.

It was the Island of Rocking Moon, with every little bay and shore indentation marked, every look-out house, every lake, the tomb of Father Paul, and the location of each feeding-station. "And look at this!" Nick thrust into her hand another sketch—a detailed drawing of a feeding-station with the box-traps and their simple mechanism. There was also much data on the fox industry, the mating season, pupping season, time of feeding and the habits of the animals.

"Looks mighty bad—mighty bad!" The Colonel pursed his lips and shook his head regretfully. His loquaciousness for once had deserted him.

"You're right, Colonel. No one but a spy for fox pirates would have any use for this information." Nick's eyes were on Sasha. When she did not speak he began gathering up the scattered notes. "He must have been in league with some one else," he went on. "Some one stationed in a launch about the Islands here. But why in the name of all that's holy he tried to monkey round with those two steel traps gets me."

The Colonel looked up impatiently. "Great Mahogany Ghost, Nick, you're more bothered about those

steel traps than anything else, it seems to me," he bel-
lowed in irritation. "Where's those foxes, that's what
I want to know!" He thumped the table with his fist.

Nick went on rolling up the notes and maps. "I'll
take these to Kodiak to the marshal when I report the
theft," he said. "They'll wire Tynan's description to
every town in Alaska. He can't possibly get away—
he doesn't know the country well enough."

The trader did not leave the Island at once, but with
Side-money he spent several hours down at the float
putting the engine of the *Simmie and Ann* in order.
Just as they were finishing it, a fish-boat from Reza-
noff came bobbing and splashing into the bay to put off
Feodor.

He sprang to the float, a slender, dark-skinned creole,
with hands like a woman and eyes as large and softly
brown as those of the Madonna of Kazan. He had a
guitar across his back and a scarlet wool cap pulled
down over his black hair.

"She's blowing like hell outside," he called cheerfully
to Nick, and without waiting to talk, continued his
way to the house.

As he ran lightly up the veranda steps, Sasha opened
the door for him. Her cry of welcome caused his lean,
dark face to lighten with a singularly winning smile.
He jerked his gay cap from his head and brought it
against his chest with a grand gesture.

"*Solnishko*," he beamed, bowing low. "I am here
again to take care of you!"

Later, while Nick and the Colonel and Feodor were
talking over the great calamity that had befallen, Sasha
stood looking out at the little fish-boat scudding away
through the flying spray. The wind shrieked like a

siren about the eaves, and the girl's mind went back to the storms of other years, after which fishing-boats and launches had been found floating keel up on the sea.

"I think the fish-boat should have stayed here for the night, Nick. It's getting rough."

"Oh, they'll be all right, Sasha," the trader assured her. "They're going to lie till morning in Bixby's Cove."

"But you won't leave for Kodiak tonight, Nicolai." There was a note of anxiety in her voice. "It's too dangerous on the straits with the wind from this direction."

Nick lifted one shoulder carelessly. "I'll make it all right. I've got to go over to Oo-koon first, anyway, and I can cut across to Kodiak from there. This affair ought to be reported as soon as possible, Sasha. By the way," he added after a moment, "Feodor's arm is in pretty good shape now. I'll take Side-money with me, I think. It's always better to have two men aboard the *Pup* in the winter."

"You're crazy to start out now, Nick." Feodor's statement was emphatic. "You'll be bucking a head wind all the way. If the weather gets any colder you'll be iced down before you've gone thirty miles."

Again Nick shrugged. "It won't get any colder," he asserted, and a few moments later passed out on his way to his launch.

Sasha, at the window, looked over the snow to the float. The two launches bumped and rocked on the water and beyond them the bay, bleak, lettuce-green in the wan sunlight, was torn to tatters and skurrying vapors under the lash of the whistling wind. Gusts of dry snow came whirling and stinging against the

windows like volleys of salt. It would be a bitter night on the sea, yet Nicolai was going to brave the danger of it for her—to call the law to her aid. But could anyone bring back her stolen foxes, she thought despondently; or her faith in men—in Gary?

In the light of the last few hours her thoughts went back over the months of the cheechako's sojourn on Rocking Moon, and she weighed the evidence for and against him. She found it for the most part, against him. He had never been much of a talker, but always an eager listener. She remembered that he had encouraged all of them to talk—especially of the Island and the foxes. He had tried to secure information from Nick about the Island of Oo-koon, and he had sat for hours listening to old Seenia. Unlike Nicolai, he never talked of himself, of his past achievements, of his future hopes. She knew he had been in France during the war, yet he never spoke of it in detail. Always he seemed to be waiting for something. Could it have been that he was waiting for the opportunity her father's peril had given him? Something within her answered no—but Nick had said she was no judge of human nature. She had never been out in the world—the real world.

Anyone could see that Gary Tynan was no laborer, yet when his steamer came, instead of going South, he had preferred to stay on at Rocking Moon—at a laborer's wage. She recalled that foggy day on the north cliffs when they had sat on a log and watched the shags on the rocks below. He had told her then—if she did not need him, he was going to take a cabin at Rezanoff, and she— Her cheeks grew hot at the recollection. Why, oh, why, had she allowed him to see how happy

she was because he remained? And on that last night when they had skated alone on Toyon Lake—she had told him by her manner, by her words that he was dear to her. She shook her head in desperate deprecation of her own action. Her face burned with a flame of self-condemnation. And yet she called back that exquisite, palpitant moment when he had placed his hands on her shoulders and bent down to her, his dark face transfigured with a soft, rapt expression that set her heart beating, even now, with a reflection of that new and wonderful rapture that had been hers then.

What had he been going to tell her—when Alexander's cry sounded in the woods back of them? She had thought he was going to say he loved her. She was ready to hear it; she longed to hear him say it—but now— Again a flame of humiliation seared her. She despised herself for a sentimental weakling. How he must have laughed at her when he was alone! How simple he must have thought her! She tortured herself picturing him laughing with his dark head thrown back and his mouth a little to one side. A sardonic laugh, scornful, cruel, like the mirth of Nicolai when she overheard him once telling Feodor about a waitress in San Francisco. The fact that she had never seen Gary Tynan like this added a terrible verisimilitude to the picture.

A slow rage began to kindle in her heart, a rage that fed on the realization that back of all, Sasha now knew she had been near to loving this cheechako—the man who set steel traps to rob her of her foxes, the man who desecrated the tomb of Father Paul, and maimed Alexander; the man who had made her a pauper. She had been near to loving him, and even now—she wanted

him back more than she wanted anything else in the world. And he—no doubt he was speeding away on a fast launch toward the south, or toward Siberia, with her little fortune aboard. Perhaps he was standing on the after-deck, his hands in his pockets, laughing back at her. She could almost hear him. Her delicate little jaw set, and her eyes glowed angrily as her fingers twitched. For the first time in her life she felt the urge to fasten them on another's throat—the smooth, brown throat of Gary Tynan. Paradoxically she found a savage comfort in this mounting rage that was taking possession of her. Anything was better than the inertia that followed her realization of ruin.

In this mood she began seeing Nick with new eyes, Nick, who had stood by her so well during the last few days. He had put aside everything to help her. She had never truly appreciated his interest in her affairs before. He had warned her long ago against Gary Tynan—but she had not listened. Perhaps, after all, Nick was a better judge of people than she had thought. She wished she had listened to him more graciously. He was down on the *Seal Pup* now, making ready to brave the danger of a northern gale for her. . . . Sasha suddenly turned from the window and slipped into her white mackinaw and cap.

"I'm going down to talk to Nicolai before he leaves, Colonel Jeff," she said, as she stood with her hand on the door-knob.

"Better get him to stay here all night, my dear. It's going to be mighty risky on the sea tonight—even for him." The Colonel looked up over the smoking pipe in his hand, and Seenia, in her chair by the fireplace, nodded her white head in confirmation of his words.

Sasha started down the path toward the float, through whirling dry snow that stung her face and blinded her. She was forced to bend her head and literally plow into the wind which held her back. The ocean outside the Island was sending up an awakening roar, and the wind whistled through the rigging of the two launches that nuzzled the float. Smoke from the stove-pipe of the *Seal Pup's* cabin blew wildly toward the shore leaving a trail of coal gas on the cold air.

When Nick saw her coming, he opened the door of the wheel-house, and with a surprised and pleased look, drew her inside.

"Did you come to say good-bye to me, Sasha?" He smiled. "Come on down into the cabin where it's nice and warm. Side-money has gone up to the house to pack his plunder. The tide will be just about right for us to start in another half hour."

Nicolai, with his soft flannel olive-drab shirt slightly bloused above his narrow hips had, at this moment, the appeal of the young bachelor surprised at home duties. He had evidently been setting the cozy cabin of the *Pup* to rights, for he swept aside a roll of papers that lay on the lower bunk, and shook up the cushions to make a back rest for Sasha. She laid aside her coat and cap and rubbed her chilled hands. A fire was glowing in the tiny stove and roaring up the pipe. The warmth was good after the biting wind, and the gentle bobbing of the launch against the float singularly pleasant. Even the sound of wind and water added to the feeling of snugness and man-made safety in the little room. Sasha, born to boats and the ways of the sea, had a man's appreciation of a good launch.

"The *Pup's* a homey little craft, Nicolai." Her eyes

were approving as she settled back against the cushions.

"Isn't she? I always keep her outfitted for a six weeks' trip. She's really the only home I have—until I find some one to help me make one ashore." He looked at her meaningly. "But just wait until next year," he went on with eagerness. "I'll have a cutter that will be the talk of the coast. See here, Sasha—" he picked up the roll of papers from the bunk. "Here are the plans." Drawing up a stool he sat in front of her and began to unroll the tracings on his knees. "I'll have the money next year to do this up right. After all, Sasha, if you have money, you can get anything in this world you want. Down in the States they never ask you *how* you got it, either. It's just *have* you got it. Money talks—" he looked up from the paper. Something in Sasha's expression silenced him.

"Nicolai—" she paused and hesitatingly laid a hand on his arm. "Have you thought how much money you are going to lose—because of this robbery?"

His eyes met hers for the fraction of a second before they dropped to her hand on his sleeve. He covered it with his warm palm, and with his blond head still bent said sympathetically:

"I've been thinking only of you—and your father."

The last words sank into the girl's consciousness. Her father! What a home-coming—after being shipwrecked! Within a month he would have no home, unless they moved back to the old Rezanoff parish house now falling into ruin for want of repairs.

"Rocking Moon will be yours, Nick. We can never pay you now, and——"

"Rocking Moon will *never* be mine!" Nick's voice was vibrant. "Good Lord, Sasha!" He put her hand

back on her lap and flung himself off the stool to take a short turn in the tiny cabin. "Do you think for one minute that I'd hold you to that darned mortgage?" He paused before her, looking down with indignation in his eyes. "What kind of a friend do you take me for, anyway? Why, look here, Sasha"—impulsively he sat down again before her, emphasizing his words with gestures of his hands. "That money my dad advanced for this ranch is yours. I have nothing to do with that at all. It's settled. You don't owe me a cent."

Sasha shook her head in slow denial.

"No, you don't," he went on. "Frankly, dear, I wouldn't have advanced you a dollar to start a fox-ranch. I never did like this notion of yours. Women should be dependent on men for their support, Sasha. The old ways are the best. This place of yours has been my rival from the beginning. If it hadn't been for it you'd have married me long ago." He leaned toward her, his elbows on his knee, his fingers busy with the tassel on the end of her sash. "But—even if you won't marry me, *milaya*," he continued slowly, "you know that I will always have enough for you and your father. You know you can depend on me, don't you?" He reached for her hand, but checked the motion midway. His restraint was not without its effect on Sasha.

"You have always been kind to me, Nicolai."

"*Kind!*" he burst out in impatient scorn. "My God, Sasha, will you never grow up!" He flung out his hand. "I don't want to be *kind* to you. I love you!"

The girl was silent, her eyes on the port-hole splashed with brine. After a moment or two Nick went on in a voice consciously subdued and calculated to appeal to

her loyalty, her love of her country: "Have you ever thought, Sasha, how the old Russian families are dying out? Your father is the last of his line. There are but few of us left in Alaska now, and—think of it, dear—ours is the best blood in America! Ours is the viking blood of the North Pacific—the Russian blood that dared the unexplored, superstition-haunted Arctic sea, in ships frail as cockle-shells. Ours is the Russian spirit that sailed on in spite of mutiny, scurvy, disease, vermin; in spite of food that crawled with worms and drinking water thick and foul in the casks!" Nick sprang to his feet, his eyes glowing. "Ours is the Russian courage, Sasha, that braved blizzards, gales, grinding ice; that drove along through a terrifying region of fog thick as a blanket, stained blood-red by the fires of hidden volcanoes, fog shot through with subterranean rumblings pregnant with destruction! Oh, think of it, Sasha, *lubimaya*—" Nick's voice was triumphant, his head lifted like a conqueror's—"Ours is the blood that discovered and tamed Alaska, the wildest, most beautiful, most hazardous land in the world! Do we want that blood diluted, lost through marriage with milk-and-water strangers from the South? Do we, Sasha?" The Irishman in Nick, always ready to be intoxicated by love, liquor, or his own eloquence, was now, paradoxically, all Russian.

Without giving the girl a chance to answer he went on, his speech softened, his eyes alight with his own visions:

"Sasha, honey, can't you see the Governor's House at Rezanoff restored to its old-time comfort, as it was when my grandfather was a commander in the Russian fleet of commerce, and yours was the head of the Or-

thodox Church in the Americas? Can't you see yourself there as mistress—*my* wife, the mother of my children, with servants and everything money can buy for you, dear? Can't you see your father happy with his books and his Church and his orphanage—yes, I'll see that he has money to build that too, Sasha. . . . And every year you can come back here for the summer. And every fall we both shall go to the States and live as I shall show you how to live, *milaya*."

Sasha tried to speak, but he bent and caught her hand in both of his. "Wait—wait till I'm through telling you, Sasha. Oh, sweetheart, I've never wanted anything in my life as I've wanted you—and I've waited so long—" he leaned toward her, singularly young and ardent as he pleaded his cause. If only he had been like this in the beginning, Sasha thought regretfully, instead of arrogantly assuming her willingness to be loved by him.

"I can make you the happiest girl in the world—if you'll marry me," he went on. "And you need me, Sasha. You need me to look out for you. . . . See how strong I am!" Like a boy he flung out his arms and flexed his muscles. A momentary flash of tenderness showed in the girl's eyes—a tenderness that was maternal. "We Alaskans should marry one of our own kind. I know that. I've—I've had experiences that you never could have, Sasha, and I know that there is something in you and in me that demands that cool, clean streak which underlies all our desires, all our passions. It's the thing that makes the women of the South seem wilted, *milaya*, when I compare them with you. It's the thing that sent me back here determined I'd marry you, sweetheart."

Sasha looked up at him, her eyes wide with wonder. Last night on the launch she had been nearly carried away by his passion, and now his eloquence swayed her. Never had he appeared so attractive, so sincere—this Nicolai who could make love to her in so many different ways. She had known him all her life—yet she did not know him. Intuitively she was conscious also of still another side of him, which he never showed to her now—that side which held an indescribable element of danger and allure; that hint of superlative savagery which used to come out in him when he danced the Whaler's Incantation and the Shaman's Dance. Something in her had always responded to him then, she remembered. She knew that something would respond now—if Nick only knew how to call it forth. It was an instinct untamed and ecstatic, that they had in common, though Nicolai, because he had chosen her for his wife, imagined that this bond was something cool and sane, befitting the mother of his children. He had seated himself again on the stool in front of her, and was waiting for her to speak. For a moment she pictured life with Nick, should she marry him—brief periods of fiercely rapturous madness, followed by long weeks of cold indifference on her part—hatred perhaps. But . . . there would always be financial security, bodily comfort for herself, her father and old Seenia . . . With Gary—

A sudden bitter recklessness swept her at the thought of Gary. She leaned forward, a question on her lips, and for the first time in her life laid her hand on Nick's thick, fair hair just below her.

At the contact every atom of her being leaped to a wild, new thrill.

"Oh!" She caught her breath, snatching away her hand, wondering what had happened to her.

The next instant she was swept into Nick's arms and he was murmuring passionate Russian endearments against her ear to the wild accompaniment of roaring wind and sea outside the rocking launch.

CHAPTER XIX

ON the night that Sasha left Rocking Moon for the radio station at Kodiak, Gary stood on the float watching the vanishing *Seal Pup* until its lights disappeared on the other side of Lookout Point. It was not until the diminishing sound of the exhaust died out over the dark waters that he stirred. Then, fighting a feeling of loneliness such as he had never before known in his roving life, he slowly retraced his steps to the house.

The garrulous yelps of fifty restless foxes came to him from the corral back of the barn where he knew the animals were peering, with eyes of blue flame, through the meshes of the enclosure. The Colonel's hasty reference to fox-poachers was disquieting. He quickened his footsteps with the intention of asking Side-money to tell him more about fox-poaching in Southeastern Alaska.

But the helper was nowhere about the place, though he had left the float after a short conversation with Nick just before the *Seal Pup* pulled out. Gary put some wood on the coals in the fireplace, and taking up a lantern went out to the barn. He called, but the silence was broken only by the yelping of the aroused foxes.

The lantern that usually hung upon a nail near the

salmon vats was gone, however, and Gary concluded that Side-money was off on another of his nocturnal prowls. Something there was about the fellow which Gary did not trust, yet he was forced to admit the helper was diligent in his surveillance of the beaches.

Alexander was still in the living-room. Realizing that the thick-coated animal would be more comfortable where it was cooler, Gary dragged down some hay from the rack over the cow's stall, and made a bed in one corner of the barn. He was soon settling the wounded fox in these new quarters.

As he eased Alexander onto the hay he felt the animal's hot little tongue caressing his hand.

"Poor little cuss!" He stroked the soft fur sympathetically. "Tough luck . . . tough luck." With a gusty sigh Alex placed his muzzle on the young man's knee and looked up with such eyes of misery that Gary's throat contracted.

"It's hell, old man. It's hell," he repeated at intervals. Alexander, with his shy, wild ways of friendliness had established himself firmly in Gary's affections. The sight of the bandaged leg sent his mind back to the many times two perfect forefeet had rested against his chest as the fox stood to snuggle a cool little nose against his neck.

"You human little devil!" he said with regretful tenderness. It hurt him to think that any creature so beautiful should have to go always on three legs, stumping along like a maimed young veteran of the world war.

Thrusting the last thought hastily from him, he was giving Alex a good-night pat, when a sharp yelp from the other side of the lantern-lit barn drew his eyes.

The little Sampson, because of the cold weather, was domiciled in a den in the barn, and the dim glow showed his tiny, astute face peering out with expectant impatience from his door. His "outfit," so laboriously contrived by the Colonel, had shifted askew, and the dangling bits of red tape with which it was tied gave him a look so comical that Gary chuckled.

He crossed over and looked down at the queer little beast.

"Hello, Clown!" he said, stooping to rub a bare ear. "I suppose you want attention now, don't you? It begins to look as if I had a fox hospital on my hands—though you're a proper subject for a beauty parlor, Sam. . . . No, no—" as Sampson began ecstatically nosing his hand—"I'm not going to give you any rubbing with tonic now, my boy. You'll get your massage tomorrow."

He passed out to look over the foxes in the corral before he went back to the house.

On the veranda he stood a moment gazing out on the dim, dark bay over which clouds were blotting out great areas of stars. It seemed years, instead of hours, since he and Sasha had skated on Toyon Lake under the aurora. His thoughts dwelt on that brief period of happiness and it was not until he saw a light bobbing along the beach below that he came back to the present. A few minutes later Side-money lumbered up the path swinging his lantern.

"Just thought I'd take a look-see over the outer beach to make sure no boat is anchoring off the Island." He held the lantern before his face and turned down the wick. "I been kinda uneasy lately. That there fox gettin' his foot caught that way—I don't know. . . .

Looks like a steel trap to me. What you think, Ty-nan?" He squinted out from under the shadow of his hat brim, his sharp eyes searching Gary's face. Then he laughed as he answered the question himself. "Don't know just what to think, maybe—a cheechako like you, eh?"

"Come inside and we'll talk it over. Maybe a sour-dough like yourself can enlighten me," Gary added dryly, aware of the covert mockery in the man's voice.

Talking it over with Side-money revealed little, and it was not long before the helper stood up and gave a prodigious yawn that disclosed all his tobacco-stained teeth. "We-l-l," he said, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "guess I'll be hittin' the hay."

After he had gone Gary sat before the fireplace thinking. Morning was so near he did not go to bed but made himself a cup of coffee, and bringing down from his room a note-book, sat before the living-room fire busily writing. A time or two he walked to the windows and looked out. The atmosphere was filled with slowly falling flakes—the first snow of the season. It occurred to him to marvel at the mildness of the climate in the Aleutians. It was the last of November, and here, in what the outside world was ever calling "the frigid North," the first snow was falling, gently, quietly, bringing him a feeling of security rather than coldness.

Side-money came down stairs after a while, stopping midway to yawn mightily, as he had five hours before, when he ascended to his room.

The early morning hours were spent in the barn cooking fox-food, and attending to the cow, whose outdoor roaming was at an end now that the snow had

come. Alexander was able to hobble painfully from his straw and eat the bird-stew Gary made for him by abstracting a jar of Sasha's canned duck from the cellar. It was about noon when the two men carried the fox-food down to the *Simmie and Ann*, and Side-money prepared for the run about the Island on his way to Rezanoff for Feodor.

Snow had been coming down thickly all morning, and already Rocking Moon lay white in the quiet, opaque olive of the sea. The buyers would never come in such weather.

Side-money was in a jocose mood, despite his short night's sleep. Gary went carefully over the temperamental engine of the launch before the helper went aboard.

"Handle her gently," he cautioned. "Don't go monkeying with the carburetor if she begins to miss. She'll pick up again all right if you let her alone."

"Don't you worry none about me runnin' an engine!" proclaimed Side-money, stepping inside the wheel-house with a prideful pose of the chest. The next moment his head was thrust out of the window, his big, stained teeth exposed in a wide grin. "So long, Tynan!" He waved his hand. "If I don't show up, you'll know a fox-pirate got me." He laughed and a few minutes later the launch shot away through the falling snow.

Gary carried food to the two stations nearest the house, and then fed the foxes in the pens. For an hour he busied himself shoveling out a path to the barn, although the snow was falling thickly, blotting out even the forest that lay so close to the back of the fox pens. He began a path from the veranda toward the beach, pausing often in his work to look out toward

the bay. Because of the descending flakes he could see no further than the upper line of the beach, where yellowed blades of rice-grass stuck up through the snowy ridge. He listened, thinking he might hear the sound of the *Simmie and Ann's* exhaust, but the silence was intense. It seemed as tangible as the falling snow. Even the murmur of the sea was smothered in the soft, steady descent.

Early twilight had come by the time the last path was finished. Gary shook the white thatch from his head and shoulders and glanced at his watch. It was after four o'clock. As he tightened the worn strap that bound the timepiece rather insecurely to his wrist, he wondered how much longer it would be before Side-money and Feodor returned.

He stamped in the back way to the kitchen to prepare a mulligan against the return of the hungry men, and lit the lamps. The house, still as a tomb, echoed to his footsteps. In the living-room the chairs of Seenia and Colonel Jeff were aching vacant. He tried to dispel the loneliness by building up a fire in the living-room; but the ruddy glow seemed only to emphasize the emptiness and stillness. He stood a moment looking at Sasha's chair. The Indian basket that held her knitting filled the space between the arms. The scarf she had been working on spilled its yellow softness over the edge of the basket and a ball of wool had fallen to the floor. He stooped to pick it up, his hands lingering on the bright yarn her fingers had known.

"Sasha . . . *solnishko moyo* . . ." softly, experimentally he spoke the Russian endearment he had often heard Zoya use. Then, though he was all alone, he shot a swift glance about and his lean face grew scarlet

to the roots of his hair. He was a darned, sentimental fool, he told himself, as he stalked off to the kitchen to add a bit of water to the mulligan which was already sending up appetizing whiffs of steam from under its agitated lid.

He was replenishing the wood in the kitchen range when it occurred to him that he would have time to give little Sampson his rub before the men came home. He slipped a jar of hair-salve—recently substituted by the Colonel for the tonic—into his mackinaw pocket, and added a broken cigar box with the idea of making new splints for Alexander's leg. He was just turning away when his eye fell on the knife Colonel Jeff called his "Toad-stabber." It was of home manufacture and had first manifested as a file in the world of commerce. The Colonel had sharpened it to a razor-like edge which, when not in use, was protected by a walrus-hide sheath. It was the very thing for cutting splints and Gary, after putting it in his pocket, lighted his lantern and started for the barn.

Already the new trail was an inch deep in snow, but the falling flakes were fewer and smaller. He hung his lantern on a nail in the barn, the movement making shadows dance wildly about the two great salmon vats squatting in the dusk at the farther end.

"Now then, little Can-o'-worms, we'll attend to you first," he remarked as he interrupted Sampson's welcoming wriggles by taking him up in his arms. With a word to Alexander uncurling expectantly on his straw bed, Gary sat on the floor, his back to the vats, and began to untie the red tape which fastened Sampson into his outfit. The heavy mackinaw hindered the free use of his arms, so he drew it off, and taking

the jar of salve from the pocket, tossed the garment towards Alex's bed.

The tiny nude fox stretched out across Gary's knees in a preparatory attitude as the young man jabbed his fingers into the jar, talking meanwhile to break the unaccustomed loneliness.

"Sam, old kid, it begins to look as if this treatment is a case of love's labor lost." He was smearing some salve on the palm of his hand when a faint, stealthy sound in the shadows back of him arrested the action. . . . Snow slipping from the eaves, he decided after a moment, and began rubbing the bare back of the fox. "Yes, Sampson, I'm afraid you'll have to go through life naked as an egg. We've used pretty nearly everything known to man and unless——"

A sudden sense of danger—a strange, occult warning, for there had been no other sound, made him raise his head sharply and half turn around. The next instant there came the thud of a blow, a queer, long sigh, and Gary crumpled with almost ludicrous slowness to the floor.

Consciousness struggled to break through the lethargy creeping over him. He heard, as a man going under an anæsthetic, the fast-dimming voices of men, a scuffling behind him, and the rapid firing of a rifle outside the barn. He tried desperately to rouse himself, but it was useless. He sank into a timeless pit of oblivion where he went down, down, down, laved by smooth undulating waves of darkness. . . .

When Gary again became vaguely conscious of existence he was floating up out of the vast silence of the pit. Something hard made itself felt at the back of his neck. He moved his head, seemed to lose control of

it, and it swung in a gigantic half circle over a stony surface. The ensuing pain did much to bring him to himself. A burble of subdued voices a long way off penetrated to his inner consciousness. He tried to reassemble the faculties that had deserted him, but was aware only of the ache at the back of his head—intolerable now. Impressions leaped aside as he strove to grasp them. . . .

He shivered, and at last, by a superhuman effort of will was able to open his eyes. For an indefinite time he was the center of a swiftly moving dark disk edged with light. Gradually the speed of the disk slackened . . . spread out . . . flattened . . . became stationary, and to Gary's blurred wonder the light resolved itself into a lantern hanging from a post. He stared, wide-eyed, with mental activity suspended. Then sounds began to be clear to him,—the rumble of voices, the tramp and crunch of feet. Struggles. Yelps. He lay vainly trying to connect these disturbances with the lighted lantern.

"Put three in a sack at once . . . get a move on there. . . ."

"Come on! *Come—on!*" a tensed, half-whispered conversation was going on nearer.

"Aw, let's get that one in the barn, Con. It's the best of the lot!"

"Don' be a damn fool altogether. That cheechako's liable to come to any minute now. *Come on*, I tell you. Even if he can't move, he can *see!*"

There was a crunching of snow, a diminishing of the voices and then silence.

Slowly, jerkily, with short lapses into abeyance, memory returned to Gary. He was in Sasha Laria-

noff's barn. Some one had crept up behind him and hit him on the head. He did not know how long ago, but he was cold, very cold. Something lay warm against him. He tried to put out his hand and found that he lay bound hand and foot with his sore head resting on one of the big Russian bricks near the stove.

Through his bewilderment he felt the warm thing stir, and though the effort was agonizing, he lifted his head. There, snuggling and shivering against him was the little naked Sampson, who missed his warm outfit lying now beside the overturned jar of salve in the middle of the floor.

Gary's head fell back on the brick once more and for a moment he lay nauseated, unable to make further effort. Then through the silence came the sharp cough of a starting engine down at the float. It was followed by the steady throb of a running motor. The diminishing sound of the exhaust galvanized Gary into a desperate alertness. As a mother knows her child's voice, so the launchman knows the sound and rhythm of his own engine, and Gary realized that it was not the *Simmie and Ann* speeding away from the float. Neither was it the *Seal Pup*. Yet, somewhere he had heard that peculiar, mechanical pulsing before. . . . Then, like a flash it came to him: It was the same motor that had carried the mysterious hidden launch away in the fog that day he and Sasha had crossed over to the tomb of Father Paul!

His mind clarified suddenly. The voices, the yelping, the sound of the departing launch, all the hazy, amorphous impressions of the last ten minutes crystallized into realization staggering as a blow—the foxes! Some one had robbed the corral back of the barn! He

must get out immediately to see which way the launch went!

He made a frantic effort to roll himself sideways, but the violent jerk made his head throb again. A moment later, when he succeeded in sitting up he found that not only was he bound hand and foot, but the rope had been fastened to the iron ring in the rim of the huge kettle embedded in the brick stove.

He made another terrific and unreasoning effort to roll himself away from the stove, with the same result. Again he sat up and struggled to free his hands bound behind his back. The rope chafed, then cut through the skin. His watch slipped off his wrist, but the knots did not give. He continued to strain, gritting his teeth and cursing until the little Sampson crept away and huddled shivering at a distance, regarding his former friend with frightened, yellow eyes. Then sanity returned. While the faint chugging of the departing launch mocked him, Gary began to think.

The way out came—a desperate inspiration. He shook the long black hair from his eyes and called: "Alexander!" Alexander should bring him his coat lying in the gloom of the far corner, the Toad-stabber still in the pocket. He called again turning his head farther around so he could see the straw bed.

It was empty.

Gary was swept by a sickening surge. He closed his eyes to shut out the dizzy whirling of the lantern. As he tried to steady himself he became aware that something was moving stealthily behind the salmon vats. He stiffened and listened. When he opened his eyes a profanely joyous greeting burst from him, for Alexander, with furtive, wary looks was limping out from

his hiding-place where he had been concealed while the disturbance was going on.

"You clever little son-of-a-gun!" broke from Gary in a half-sob of thanksgiving. But—was Alexander's intelligence and capacity for affection great enough to surmount his fear and the pain of his crippled leg?

"Hello, Alex!" Gary's voice was coaxing, while his mind tried to banish the thought that the retrieving lessons might be forgotten for the time being. "Bring me my coat. Go ahead—get it, old boy."

The fox paused and glanced toward the brick stove; then he continued to limp toward his bed. A moment later he had settled down on the straw. Gary knew the animal must be in pain but the need for haste drove him to renewed appeals. Alexander lifted his head in response to the voice he had learned to love and obey, and made a tremendous effort to rise, only to fall back again. Gary groaned as he met the look of those round, anguished eyes. They pleaded as plainly as words that it was impossible for a crippled fox to play the old game tonight. Gary began again, coaxing, beseeching, until the sweat stood out on his forehead and little Sampson, encouraged by the tones of his voice, came tiptoeing back to cuddle down beside him again.

It seemed an hour to the intense, anxious Gary, though in reality it was not more than five minutes before Alexander struggled to his feet and stood shivering, his eyes on his bound friend.

"My coat, Alex! Bring it here. . . . T-h-a-t's the boy!"

Painfully at last the fox hobbled to the coat, nipped it by the sleeve and coming slowly on his three legs,

dragged the heavy garment a few inches along the floor. He sank, with a whine of pain, his eyes pleading for release.

"Come on . . . come on, little fellow. . . ."

Fearing that the knife would slip from the wide pocket, Gary held his breath as the plucky little animal limped nearer and nearer. When the fox was beside him holding the mackinaw up in his mouth, he dropped it at a word and stood expectantly awaiting the petting and the reward of food that had heretofore been his for the service.

The instant the garment lay on the floor Gary rolled over till his bound hands could fumble for the knife. His fingers fastened avidly about the handle. Several vain attempts to sever the cord about his wrists brought blood, but persistent efforts resulted in freedom. The next instant he had boldly slashed the rope that bound his ankles.

As his bonds fell from him he rushed out of doors where he could see the bay. It had stopped snowing and the night was strangely luminous. But there was no sign of the launch. Neither could he hear the sound of the motor.

He plunged through the snow toward the fox pens where the doors hung open. A few minutes later he came out of the enclosure and leaned weakly against the framework of the door.

Every fox was gone.

CHAPTER XX

WITH his hands pressed to his aching head, Gary stumbled back to the barn. He thrust his arms into the sleeves of his mackinaw and picked up his fallen watch, strapping it again to his wrist. Hastily tying Sampson's outfit on him, he placed the little animal beside Alexander, already settled in his straw bed, and after a hurried pat on the wounded fox's head, ran out into the snow.

He kept on through the alder grove until he could look down on the float. It lay, a nebulous square on the quiet darkness of the water. The *Simmie and Ann* had not returned. He was alone on Rocking Moon without a boat at a time when everything depended on one. A maddening sense of impotence seized him as he realized his helplessness.

He concentrated his whole being on listening. There was not a sound in the gray, twilit world except the far-off murmur of the sea. The pirate launch had passed out of hearing, but which way? It might have gone either round Lookout Point in the direction of Rezanoff, or round Lampadny Point. A moment's consideration convinced him that Lookout would have shut off the sound of the engine in a very few moments and he was quite sure he had heard the peculiar throb of the motor at least ten minutes. He must reach

Lampadny before the launch passed from sight—but how?

Like an inspiration came the thought of the little kayak—the one-hatch skin boat that had been stowed away on a rack behind a larger two-hatch bidarka in the barn. He lowered the light craft to the floor and with it on his back hurried down to the float. A moment later, propelled by swift, strong strokes of the double paddle, the kayak was speeding like a nutshell before a wind. Gary's thoughts kept pace with it as the dim, snow-laden forests of Rocking Moon slipped past him.

He reasoned that some of the robbers had entered the barn by way of the forest under cover of the falling snow of the afternoon. The waiting pirate launch, probably anchored on the other side of Lookout Point, had come into the float at the gun-shot signal Gary had heard when he was sinking into unconsciousness. He was puzzled at the smoothness with which everything had worked into the fox-pirates' hands. Each act had been timed to a nicety. Yet—what if Side-money had returned with the *Simmie and Ann*, and caught them? Had they kept a watchman on the Lookout? Gary remembered the helper's last joking words: "If I don't come home, you'll know a fox-pirate got hold of me." Could they have made away with the fellow—and with the *Simmie and Ann*?

Question succeeded question in the young man's mind as the little boat rounded the low white arm of Lampadny Point, and began its course along the outer beach. How had the pirates known just how to time their raid at the moment when he was alone on the Island? he was asking himself, when the cross of

Father Paul, his objective, loomed above the snow. An instant later his paddle fell athwart the kayak and an exclamation of amazement escaped him.

From the old missionary's *lampada* a light was shining out over the sea!

Gary quickened his strokes until the bow of the kayak ran with a soft thud on the dark sandy strip swept clean by the receding tide. He sprang from the man-hole, drew the skin boat up on the beach, and plunged through the snow toward the log tomb.

The six-foot cross made an excellent lookout for scanning the sea. Gary shinned up to the top bar and sat astride the upright. For some minutes his eyes searched the ocean, seeing nothing but the limitless miles of dark, undulating water under a clearing sky that had taken on the serene pure blue of night. A few widely scattered stars hung large and blurred behind drifting moth-colored clouds, or sprang into brilliance when the ragged, diaphanous mists sailed past.

Again and again his glances swept the wide half circle. Only the faint, smudged-in pyramid of Ookoon relieved the emptiness. Evidently, Gary told himself, his reasoning as to the course of the pirate launch had been faulty. It must have gone round Lookout Point, after all. But where was Side-money, and the *Simmie and Ann*? Once more, with that hope that is born of uncertainty, he began a last scrutiny of the watery wilderness.

His eyes had become accustomed to the mysterious reaches of the sea and a pale light was making an illumination toward the east. He turned his head slowly, but as before, nothing arrested his attention

until his gaze fastened on shadowy Oo-koon. . . . He started, and forgetful of his precarious perch, leaned forward so suddenly that he nearly lost his balance. *Between Rocking Moon and that far island something dark lay low on the water!* Was it the pirate launch—or a wave? A wave would flatten . . . This did not. Was it the mysterious launch, or the *Simmie and Ann*, gone off her reckoning in the afternoon snow and now returning? . . . He watched it so intently that his eyes filmed with moisture.

The object drew no nearer. On the contrary, it grew smaller. It vanished—vanished in the direction of Oo-koon. Perhaps Nick Nash's ranch was next on the list.

Gary slid down from the cross and a stream of light shot over him from the reflector of the new lamp as he stood in the snow on the roof of the tomb. He stamped his feet and waved his arms to restore his circulation, before he opened the glass door of the *lampada*. The oil in the lamp was nearly gone. From the amount burned—if it had been full in the beginning—it was evident that some one had landed and lighted it that afternoon during the thickest fall of snow. This, Gary suddenly concluded, was no act of devotion. It was a signal.

Incidents, like moths, came flocking out of the past three months, to encircle the *lampada* of Father Paul:—that day with Sasha when they had heard the voices in the fog, and the sound of the mysterious launch; Side-money's announcement of the modern new lamp on the cross; Seenia's reverent regard for the shrine she had served for so many years; the custom of the fishermen. What a country was this, he thought,

where piety and piracy went hand in hand! Reason told him that this new lamp must have been placed in the *lampada* weeks ago in preparation for tonight's work. Anywhere else in the world the thing would have aroused suspicion from the first, but, Gary saw now, some one fully acquainted with the custom of the fishermen had boldly used the tomb as a signal station. Equally clear was the fact that the offenders must have been well acquainted with the movements of all on Rocking Moon.

A foot of fresh snow lay about the tomb, but with the exception of his own tracks the white surface was smooth. Gary was walking along the margin of the flat top peering down to satisfy himself of this, when suddenly the deceptive white edge gave way and the next moment he was sprawling in a drift on the ground. He dashed his hand across his face to wipe the melting flakes from his eyes, and in order to rise from his awkward position, placed a hand firmly against one of the logs forming the end wall. There was a creaking sound, and to his amazement the log swung in like a door.

He thrust his head into the dark opening and was met by the smell of damp gunny-sacks. It was the work of but a moment to scramble once more to the top of the tomb and bring down the lighted lamp.

As he turned the reflected light into the narrow chamber, white log walls sprang out in horizontal ridges. In the center of the sandy floor, ringed about with footprints, lay a small mound of dark-stained gunny-sacks. About the base logs blades of rice-grass had grown in under the foundation and died in writhing, worm-like attitudes. At the farther end, where a

heavy upright marked the base of the cross, lay a roll covered with black oilcloth.

While these impressions flashed and photographed themselves on his brain, Gary set the lamp down and crawled in after it. He began lifting the gunny-sacks one by one. At the bottom of the heap lay a smooth, tapering, three-foot board, and two small steel traps. The Colonel was right, after all. Alexander had been caught in a steel trap. If the plucky little fox had not torn his own foot away his skin would now be drying on that stretcher.

Two steel traps and one stretcher! The meagerness of the outfit in the tomb contrasted with the wholesale stealing of the afternoon was strikingly incongruous. It seemed hardly possible that the same pirates who had walked off with fifty foxes, would risk detection by setting out two steel traps. Was it possible that two robber gangs were poaching on Rocking Moon?

Gary reached over and laying hold of the bundle at the base of the cross, unrolled it. Two fox skins fell out. This, he told himself, was no Alaskan's work. No Aleut or creole would desecrate the tomb of the old monk by using it, not only as a signal station and as a cache for stolen furs, but also as a skinning house. This was the work of a white man.

Still crouching, the young man rolled the skins into the oilcloth again and reached to pick up the cord which had encircled the bundle. As he stooped the Colonel's Toad-stabber in the pocket of his mackinaw shifted and began to slip. The edge of the clumsy sheath held on the pocket-flap, but the knife itself came sliding out. Instinctively Gary sprang back to

save his foot. The knife, heavy blade overbalancing the light handle, plunged point first, burying itself in the sand up to the hilt.

With an exclamation of irritation, Gary grasped the handle and gave it a pull. It did not move. The point was firmly embedded in something six inches below the surface.

"What the devil—" he muttered, as he gave it another jerk. It came away and he thrust it hastily into its sheath as he turned to leave.

Why he suddenly decided to find out what the knife blade had encountered he never was able to tell afterward; but a moment later, with the stretching board as a shovel, he was digging away the sand at the base of the cross.

His mind was so full of Sasha's misfortune that he was only faintly surprised when he lifted out a flat box, bound with tarnished brass. It was little over a foot square and the mark of his knife showed plainly in the lid.

Hurriedly filling the hole again, he replaced the roll and piled the gunny-sacks back, arranging everything as he had found it, for he wished to keep the owner of the traps in ignorance of his entrance to the tomb. Already a plan was taking form in his mind.

Just as he finished the work the lamp gave a feeble splutter and went out. He picked it up, tucked the box under his arm and made his way to the long, narrow opening that marked the swinging log.

Outside he obliterated the telltale marks of his entrance by tramping a path around the tomb, kicking the snow until all sides were equally disturbed; then, after returning the lamp to the *lampada*, he hastened

down to the beach, and shoved the brass-bound box into the bow of the kayak before he launched it.

Fifteen minutes later he entered the living-room of the ranch-house where the lights were burning just as he had left them. It was very still everywhere. The absence of the *Simmie and Ann* at the float gave proof that Side-money had not yet returned, though he had been gone over seven hours. But—in view of the thing he planned to do, Gary did not regret the non-appearance of the helper.

Now that Gary was going into action on his own initiative, his blood began to course warmly and his spirits to soar as he swiftly made his preparations. That mind which had so long refused to build fiction plots for him, was building again—only now it was working with facts. From the storehouse of his memory little incidents, words, looks, were crowding in on him, nudging one another, taking on new and significant meanings in the light of tonight's happenings. As he moved about he was mentally shifting incidents of the past two months, shifting them and fitting them together again like pieces of a cardboard puzzle. The effect was sketchy in the extreme, but he felt he was justified in going ahead with the wild plan he had conceived.

After putting on the warmest clothes he owned, he made up a small bundle of *beleek*, hardtack and milk chocolate—food that needed no cooking. He added several squares of camphor gum from the medicine chest, a large tin cup and an electric flash-light.

When he had stowed his outfit away in the bow of the kayak, he put out a day's food for the animals in the barn, watered them and returned to the house

to extinguish the lights. He was about to write a note for Sasha telling her where he had gone, but reconsidered the matter. He would be back within twelve hours, and when Side-money returned—he had his reasons for keeping the helper in ignorance of his destination.

The brass-bound box lay on the living-room table. Gary who had forgotten it for the time being, took it up and began fumbling with the cover. It was locked. He lifted it in appraising hands and shook it. Whatever it contained was tightly wedged inside, for there was no sound. The thing could not belong to the fox-pirates who were using the tomb as a cache—the stains on the brass were too old for that. Perhaps—Like a flash it came to him. It held something connected with the religious ceremony customary in Father Anton's church. Gary had a moment's panic. "For the love of Petel!" he thought, overwhelmed with the sense of his own ridiculousness. "Here I've gone and rooted up some of the sacred relics!"

He gazed earnestly about the living-room to find a hiding-place for the box until his return. He could re-bury it then. The music cabinet, the book-cases, the buffet—all these were discarded as repositories, but when his eyes encountered the great gold-and-silver icon in the corner of the room, he advanced determinedly. A few minutes later the brass-bound box was safely hidden behind the holy picture, but the picture itself was slightly askew on its corner shelf.

When he stepped out on the veranda he found the sky entirely clear with pale berylline flushes playing in the north. As he swung hurriedly down to the float

the snow crisped under his boots, and the cold air stung in his nostrils, turning his breath to puffs of vapor ahead of him. Clear, cold weather promised a smooth sea, he thought, as he eased himself into the man-hole of the kayak.

With the first dip of his paddle the light craft shot out, furrowing the reflections of large stars glimmering on the dark surface of the bay.

Gary was embarking on an adventure so hazardous that even Nick Nash would have refused it. At the most treacherous season of the year, he, a cheechako, was setting out over miles of open sea in the smallest, crankiest craft known to man—a craft little longer and wider than himself. He was well aware that one of the quick-rising winds, common in the North, could roughen the ocean until his chances for life would be about one in fifty. He expected, of course, to encounter danger when he reached his destination; but now, like a boy with a new toy, he was enjoying the speed of his featherweight boat.

When he passed the low arm of Lampadny Point, he took his bearings by the tiny compass he had fastened to a thong in the deck of the kayak, and turning the prow eastward, headed out across the night waters toward the cave-pitted, mysterious Island of Oo-koon.

CHAPTER XXI

THE swish of water along the sides of the kayak told Gary that Rocking Moon must be falling rapidly behind him, although, being comparatively unfamiliar with his treacherous little boat, he could not risk turning his head to see. He sat flat on the bottom of the fragile, man-made shell, a speck under the starry sky, with only a thickness of seal-skin between him and the black depths of the ocean.

When he found himself well out beyond the lee of the islands where inky, slow-heaving rollers swept down from the northwest, he had moments of misgiving. The mystery, the vastness, the magnificent solitude filled him with an awe that had in it a touch of the primeval. Here was the loneliest place in the world. Here was Nature in its freest, most elemental form; Nature terribly beautiful, fearsomely grand, cruelly impersonal. He knew that one second of incautious steering, one miscalculation in regulating the stroke of his paddle, one unthinking shift of his body and he, helpless and fastened in the cockpit, would be hanging head down in the sea, under the capsized kayak. His was not the skill that enables the Aleut to right himself under such circumstances.

At first every muscle in him tensed when the tiny canoe headed starward, climbing the shimmering slope

that led to the crest of a roller. He relaxed for a moment on the safety of the summit, but again caught his breath in suspense at the downward plunge into a valley of the deep where the pale light of night was absent. It was a tremendous, soul-stirring experience to find himself rising from the trough of every wave, and by the puny man-strength of his own arms, speeding onward.

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" he thought, marveling as he became surer of himself. The quiet of the night, the knowledge of miles safely traveled, brought a new and intoxicating confidence in himself. This immensity, this potential power, this majestic, deliberate rhythm of the sea was subject to his hand! He was conscious of his mastery, yet at the same time filled with a great and reverent wonder—a wonder of the world and of himself. No longer did he feel insignificant, mean, in the scheme of things. He was a man, a master of the elements. In him was a spark of that mighty intelligent Force that molds the ether into worlds.

The miles slipped behind him. His head, though still aching, troubled him less; but his legs, unaccustomed to such forced inaction, cramped painfully. Yet, he considered himself fortunate that no wind had come up to stir the slumbering swells.

He wondered where Sasha was, little dreaming that at the same moment the girl was standing in the wheelhouse of the *Seal Pup* thinking of him as the launch carried her home to Rocking Moon from the radio station.

He was going more easily now. Whenever the little kayak lifted to the crests of rollers he could see Oo-

koon looming ahead through the semi-transparency of the Northern night. Intent on these glimpses, he was startled by a gigantic sigh almost at his elbow. He was more amazed when he saw, rounding slowly and lazily from the dark waters, the glistening back of a white whale—the Ghost whale, the beluga of the Arctic.

Gary was fascinated and not a little apprehensive. He paddled with more haste. Leisurely the creature disappeared, only to come up again beside him farther on. It continued, with mechanical regularity, to show itself, always at the same distance from the kayak. It seemed almost as if the friendly monster had constituted itself a bodyguard for the little craft, and Gary wondered if the great white whale intended keeping abreast of him as far as Oo-koon. He was beginning to feel an uneasy companionship with the beluga when suddenly it sank and he saw it no more.

Under the paling stars, the night took on a deeper dusk as he drew near his destination. He had been going over in his mind all that Seenia had told him of the volcanic island where he was so soon to land. It was not more than six miles in length, and Nash's fox-ranch occupied the only sheltered place on its coast, near the great Cave at the head of a Cove. But Gary had no intention of landing at the Cove. He could not afford to run the risk of being sighted by the pirate launch—if it had gone in there. Instead, he paddled on past the gray-white slopes rising from dark cliffs abruptly stopped to face the sea. When he swung his prow and began to move along the coast, rocks awash appeared between him and the shore, and even in the dim light he could see streaks of foam licking the blackened basaltic feet of Oo-koon. The

slapping sound of the ocean sucking in and out of unseen caves struck strangely on his ears.

He knew he was doing a foolhardy thing in picking his way thus along an unknown coast-line in the morning dusk. True, his study of charts in the wheel-house of the *Simmie and Ann* had given him some knowledge of the contour of Oo-koon and the soundings, but nevertheless he might run on a submerged rock at any moment, and the slightest contact would split the frail kayak open like a dried bladder on the point of a knife. Yet, he must make a landing before daylight; he must get out of the kayak soon, too, because of the intolerable pain in his cramped legs. He could hardly control the desire to draw them up, to turn over, to do anything that would ease them. They were cold, too, though his body was sweating from the exertion of paddling.

He recalled a peculiar reef on the outer beach of Oo-koon about a mile from the entrance to the Cove. It was shaped on the chart like a curve of a fish-hook. Luck was with him, for he recognized it at last putting out as he had pictured it. It broke the swells of the ocean, and as he drew nearer to it he saw that it sheltered a tiny beach. He guided his craft cautiously into the quieter waters behind the reef and headed for the shore.

As he made his landing on a shingle of crushed pumice stone, he noted a huge sign against the low bluff backing the beach. It was blurred and indistinct in the faint light, but he made out the words:

FOX ISLAND

NO TRESPASSING

"They could shoot me on sight and be within the law," he thought, while he made an effort to rise from the cockpit of the kayak. His legs refused to support him until he had spent some minutes rubbing them and going through setting-up exercises. When he could walk he hoisted the kayak on his back and started for the bank beyond the sign.

The bluff proved to be a low wall of blackened, frost-riven breccia eaten away into hollows and openings that yawned in the dusk. Caves, he reflected; fit and gloomy dwellings for the spirits of the Aleut dead who loved in life the sound of the curious, lapping sea. From the top of the bank the twilit, snowy slope of Oo-koon rose to the crater five thousand feet above. The character of the beach, bared now by the receding tide, spoke eloquently of a time when eruptive rock and pumice stone had rolled from the very lip of that crater to the water's edge.

Gary let the kayak slide from his back in front of the largest of the caves near the sign, and a moment later was inside flashing his electric torch about the cavern. It was dry and the floor of powdered pumice sloped upward to the end perhaps fifty feet back. Driftwood and dried kelp, brought in by long-past stormy tides, were scattered here and there. It proved an ideal hiding place for the kayak.

Though his head still ached dully, the cramps had gone from his legs and he was ravenously hungry. Hastily taking the tin cup from the toe of the kayak, he crammed it full of snow, and placing a square of camphor gum on a drift log set it afire. By holding the cup over the tiny blaze a short time, he made himself a boiling hot cup of tea, which he drank,

blessing his partner in Siberia who had taught him this trick of the trail.

With a pocket full of hard-tack and *beleek*, he started out along the beach in the direction of the Cove, chewing a piece of the dried fish with Indian-like relish. The snow decided him to chance going the whole way at the edge of the surf which would erase his foot-prints—a necessary precaution should he find it expedient to keep his visit a secret. Whether he could make it he did not know, but it was the only way that offered, outside of the kayak. Without betraying his presence he must see the fox-ranch of Oo-koon before daylight came.

He had little difficulty getting past the few jutting cliffs that barred his way, and in a short time he was rounding a point from whence he could look up the narrow, deep, horse-shoe cove where he knew the ranch was situated. Another huge sign marked this point, and he slipped behind it while he scanned the waters of the inlet—mirror-like, calm and shadow-bordered in the first pale light of dawn.

At the right of the cove lay a green launch, which he had never before seen. It was broadside in such a way as partially to hide from view the float behind it. Despite the early hour, two men sat on the float with their backs to Gary, a couple of powerful gasoline lanterns on boxes throwing reflected lights over their bowed heads. The young man looked in vain for houses near the landing, until smoke rising from a snowy knoll enlightened him. Then he remembered—there were no houses on Oo-koon. Nicholas Nash was utilizing the barabaras already there—the native houses built more than half underground and roofed

with three or four feet of sod until they resembled mounds of earth. He could make out several of these now, although smoke came from only one. The fox pens were back of the barabaras—corrals larger than those on Rocking Moon, for Nash had told Colonel Jeff he was trying to raise his blue foxes in captivity. Back of the pens a few static, scrawny spruce trees stood forth, black against the grey-white barren land that rolled upward toward the dim crater of Oo-koon. In the pallor of the dawn, it was a bleak and chilling scene, suggestive, in some subtle way, of sombre and gruesome things—poignantly so when Gary remembered the hospitable beauty of the Rocking Moon ranch. He wondered where the Cave of Oo-koon might be. While Seenia had often told him of it, she had never mentioned its exact location nor described its entrance.

With his feet slipping precariously on the weed-covered rocks, Gary crept forward along the shadow of the cliff. He wanted to see what kept the men on the float so busy. He noted that the out-going tide had formed an eddy just off shore, and something was bobbing up and down as it slowly circled between two big boulders. As a freak of the current brought the thing nearer to him, he smothered an exclamation. It was a bloody carcass—the body of a skinned fox.

He crept on, flattening himself against the rocks until he dropped behind a boulder at the water's edge, from which point of vantage he had an unobstructed view of the float.

The men were sitting on boxes placed between two mounds—one a small one, one larger. Although it was not zero weather, an oil heater threw its reflected

warmth on them. Gary experienced a feeling of nausea as he looked at the scene, doubly ghastly under the mixed light of dawn and the lantern's glare.

The men were swiftly, skillfully stripping steaming pelts from foxes they took from the smaller mound, and tossing the grisly, blood-red carcasses to the other. They had the appearance of having been hours at work. But why, he asked himself, should they work by lantern light? Reason brought him the answer. All the happenings of the last few months which he had dismissed as casual, until tonight, were culminated now in this gruesome drama of the float. He knew, as well as if he were looking at the tattooed brand in the ears of those green pelts that there lay the fifty foxes which he had fed the day before in the pens of Sasha Larianoff.

The sight filled him with a flaming anger, a reckless disregard of consequences, but he curbed his first impulse toward violence and forced his mind to think calmly. The law demands proof of a theft and sure as he was himself, he could do nothing until he had proof. He must see the brand on those foxes before he left Oo-koon. He must see it without he himself being seen. The men on the float were strangers to him, but without a doubt they knew him. They, perhaps, thought him safely bound and tied to the great iron kettle in the barn at Rocking Moon. If they discovered him here . . . He tightened his lips and dismissed the thought.

He knew now there would be no robbery on Oo-koon. But Nash—what was his part in these piratical moves? Could it be that he knew of this outrage? The idea was too monstrous. Although Gary had no

love for the trader, and despised his double dealing in the matter of women, he felt that Nash must be ignorant of the raid on Rocking Moon. Something underhanded was going on here at Oo-koon, but the solving of the problem must be left until later. Gary decided to retrace his steps to his own cave and wait there until nightfall before he continued his investigations. Indeed, he was forced to wait, for daylight was coming fast.

Rising from his cramped position behind the dripping boulder with the intent to make his way back around the jutting bluff, he found that he had advanced farther than was wise in the growing light. Should the workers on the float turn their heads as he was darting around the cliff, he was sure to be discovered. His mind was busy with this complication when another presented itself. The door of the barabara opened and a third man came out with a load on his shoulder. To the trapped Gary it seemed that the new arrival was looking directly at the boulder behind which he crouched.

The man advanced to the float, threw down his pack, and then, to Gary's alarm, came on. Had the fellow seen him and was he coming to investigate? Gary looked wildly about him for some place to hide. He stood on basaltic rock swept clean of sand, so there were no footprints to betray him. Ten feet back rose the face of rugged cliffs, fissured breccia and lava formation eroded until it resembled the frontage of some dark, sea-carved glacier. The advancing man turned to shout a direction to his comrades on the float, and in that second of time Gary darted into a wide, stony crevasse.

With his eyes on the opening, through which he could see a perpendicular sliver of the Cove and farther shore, he kept backing in. The sliver of vision diminished, the dark walls widened, and the sky was shut off. Suddenly he found himself in the semi-gloom of a cavern. The uneven floor sloped upward, and save for some oars and old ropes at one side it was empty. The place smelled of dried salt brine and evidently the sea came in at extreme high tide. Gary hazarded one flash of his light toward the back wall. Plutonic forces had crevassed and columned it with gargoyled outcroppings that brought to mind the weird giant stone figures of Easter Island. He plunged into an opening that promised concealment, and with his foot feeling the way ahead of him, advanced into the inky blackness.

He went on and on, and was just about to risk another flash of his electric torch when he came up flat against a wall. Instinctively his hands went out to feel the extent of it. One struck bare rock. The other went on in unobstructed space. His light revealed a gigantic wedge of rock projecting diagonally into the narrow corridor, leaving a two-foot opening between its point and the other wall.

Gary slipped in through the passage. The quick sweep of his circling light gave him impressions of great space; of black walls, high and wide apart, of rocky shelves, piles of provisions and—He swore wonderingly under his breath. Had he blundered into the Cave of Oo-koon? Were those mummies, those bale-like things that——

He switched off his light and his heart missed a beat. In the dark passage behind him the un-

mistakable clink of hob-nails sounded on the stony floor.

The man he sought to escape was following him into the Cave!

CHAPTER XXII

GARY made sure of the advancing footsteps, then ran to the pile of provisions and clambered up to a shelf above. He winced in the darkness as his hand came in contact with the cold surface of the bales, but a second later he had wedged himself behind them.

The clink of the hob-nails rang nearer, now in the passage, now by the stone wedge, then in the Cave below. The reflection of a swinging lantern light played dimly on the rocks above Gary's head. A moment more would tell whether or not he had been seen and followed.

There came the sound of a stumble, a muttered curse and a turning over of boxes. Gary relaxed. The man was looking for something in the stores. Apparently he found it for the light disappeared and his departure was marked by the diminishing clink of his hob-nailed boots.

For a time Gary lay, every sense concentrated on listening; then gradually he became conscious of smells—commonplace smells so utterly incongruous with his ideas of the mystic mummy Cave that he found his sense of humor stirring. There were odors of fox skins, dried fish, onions, gasoline and—acidly dominant, the unmistakable reek of *macoola*. That this illicit brew should be fermenting in the historic vault of Oo-koon, seemed to Gary the last touch of irreverent

defiance flung at the gods of the past. Still, now that the weather was getting colder, it was probably the only place where the concoction ran no chance of chilling.

Encouraged by the continued silence, he was about to raise himself and flash on his light to get a better look at his surroundings, when he heard again the ring of boots and voices. The men stamped into the cavern—three of them, apparently.

"Thunderation! What a mess!" Something hit the floor. "It's like livin' in a bloody slaughter house!" came a heavy growl.

"Aw-w-w, can it!" mocked a younger voice. "You're gettin' mighty dainty all of a sudden, ain't you, Steve! See here—you stay behind and set them stretchers up to dry. Me'n Mack'll pack the pelts to you."

A scuffling noise rose from below. The man addressed as Steve was not silenced.

"Well, ain't we got a kick comin'?" he protested sulkily. "Look at the way Con side-tracked all this here slimy skinning business by galivantin' off to Rezanoff the minute we pulled this job last night."

"Stow it—stow it, Steve. You're always peddling gloom!" came the other voice. "You know he had to beat it to show up to the Boss. He'll be back this mornin', maybe." Again came the slam of something flung to the floor.

"This mornin'—he-ell!" the injured voice of Steve was beginning, but the sound of receding footsteps told that his two companions had not waited to hear his complaint; and Gary heard him cursing softly but fervently to himself as he shifted the stretched fox skins.

Con! This name had been unusual enough to fasten

itself in Gary's mind the first time he heard it, some weeks previously, in the store at Rezanoff. One of the clerks had told him Con was Nash's new keeper on the ranch at Oo-koon. Hearing it as he lay bound in the barn at Rocking Moon, and seeing the pirate launch disappearing in the direction of Oo-koon, had been two deciding factors in sending the cheechako off on a secret visit to the Island.

It was not long before the two men re-entered the cavern with another load of green pelts. They had no sooner thrown them to the floor than Steve's voice was again raised in complaint.

"Aw, cut it out!" interrupted the young voice. "You'd kick if you was going to be hung. Here we've made the biggest haul of the season and you——"

"Biggest haul—say, you make me sick, Jim. Plumb sick! We ain't off the rocks yet by a durned sight, an' you talk like the whole business was settled an' done for. . . . Young feller—there's a helluva big chance to slip up on this yet, an' don't you forget it. When a guy starts mixin' petticoats an' business, like the Boss's done lately, it means breakers ahead! You just mark my words! *One* petticoat's bad enough, but when a man starts playin' the field—that mean's he ain't thinkin' of business, an' when he *ain't* thinkin' of business, that's when somebody slips somethin' over on him, and things start to go wrong—savey?"

"Quit your belly-achin'!" came the bored young tones of Jim. "That's a sign you're gettin' old, and they'll be plantin' you one o' these days. I don't begrudge no man playin' the field—I'm goin' to do the same thing myself next spring when I hit 'Frisco with a wad in my pocket. Say—I'll be scatterin' corn for the swell

little chickens the whole length o' Powell Street, I will!"

"For criminey sake, Jim!" the third man blared impatiently. "Break away, can't you, and let's get these here pelts under cover! I want to turn in and get some sleep before the Boss comes blowing in."

"Right-o, Mack, ol' de-ah! Lead on, an' I'll be scrapin' your heels!" Jim's whistling marked his cheerful exit.

After some time the two transporters of skins threw their last loads on the floor with profane satisfaction. Gary, more puzzled now than ever, was hoping they would continue their conversation and enlighten him as to the part Nash played in this wholesale robbery, if any. But while the men set up the stretchers they spoke only of the condition of other fox pelts which had been drying in the Cave for some days.

The voice of the man addressed as Mack sounded at last:

"Say, I don't know what you guys is going to do—but I'm going to hit the hay pretty pronto. I'm all in. Know what time it is?—seven o'clock, that's what. I'm on a strike till noon, anyway. This all night business don't make no hit with *me*."

"You should worry about any more all night business, Mack. This is the last haul of the season—and now we can loaf while the Boss runs the risk," declared Jim. "Speakin' of sleep—I wonder how that poor boob of a cheechako is restin' now. Gosh, I hated to bean that guy, someway, him sittin' there so chummy with that little runt fox. . . . Kinda wish I'd put his coat over him—it's gettin' colder 'n blazes out."

"Aw, you're too soft-hearted to be piratin'!" Steve was plainly disgusted. "You'd be pretty in a young ladies' boardin'-school. Come on—let's go to bed if we're goin'."

Their heavy boots thumped along the stony floor, then came a peculiar soft and sliding sound, after which silence shut down with curious abruptness. Gary, on his shelf, lay in darkness waiting until he was sure there was no chance of their returning for some forgotten thing. He had decided to examine the contents of the Cave, the brands on the fox skins, and then make his escape while the men slept.

He counted off fifteen minutes—though to him the time seemed an hour; then eased himself about and switching on his light, stood up. As he played it along the rocky shelf he was astonished to find it piled with bale after bale of fox skins, turned fur side in. Roughly estimated he decided there must be nearly eight hundred!

He scrambled down over sacks of flour and boxes of canned goods stored beneath a tarpaulin. His torch revealed the farther side of the cavern lined with the stretched fresh pelts of foxes. Grease and blood glistened in the light. Although there was no doubt in his mind that these were Sasha's animals, he examined the ears of a dozen or more. Each one was tattooed with the brand RM-1.

Curious to see if the dried skins on the frames bore a mark, he turned an ear, then another, and another. Each carried either RM-1, or RM.

Gary swore. Not only the fifty young animals in the pen had been stolen, then, but the pirates had previously made hauls on Rocking Moon! But how,

when both he and Side-money had been watching the beaches? Side-money—understanding was beginning to dawn. He shook his head, leaving this part of the problem for later consideration, and turned his light toward the spot where the passageway should be. The glow revealed nothing but solid walls. With a sense of apprehension, Gary advanced and made a closer inspection. He could detect neither the stone wedge nor the opening.

Feeling that some sinister magic had been practiced on him, he began foot by foot, to examine the wall of the cave. There was no break, but he found where the stone wedge had apparently slid across the passage into the opposite wall. He tried to pull the barrier aside, only to discover a surface so smooth that his hands found no hold on it.

Standing in the darkness he knew, for a moment, the panic of a trapped thing. Then, remembering Seenia's account of a crack in the wall which admitted air from the outside, he played his light on the high ceiling.

The bright ray moved slowly over half the length of the vault, disclosing nothing but black, barren rock; then suddenly, high in the shadows, it found and lingered on a horrible, swaying face. Gary thrilled with pure terror, until he realized he was looking at the ghastly dried grin of an Aleut mummy.

He saw it clearly now, suspended from the rocky ceiling in a three-foot mummy-case. Swinging in a fine net of sinew, the age-blackened fiber matting covered the body which had been bound and dried in a squatting position. Some one had torn away the matting over the head, and the parchment-like face, eyeless, noseless, but agape with the hideous, amorphous

smile of the dead, nodded knowingly down under a thatch of black hair.

With the feeling that he was somehow taking part in one of the wild adventure tales he had once written, Gary moved his light along over the top of the cavern; it fell only on bare spaces. There was only one mummy left in the Cave of Oo-koon. But—he and this gruesome relic of the past were entombed together.

Thinking to conserve his battery, he switched off the torch, and was instantly plunged into darkness so thick that it was tangible; silence so intense that it listened.

. . . Despite all his efforts to the contrary, weird, new fears began to blow slyly upon him. The blackness became a background for the horribly merry face nodding from the ceiling; the crafty silence but a preparation for a sudden cackle of cadaverous mirth. He cursed his imagination, but suddenly he knew things he had pondered over hitherto, and been unable to understand. He was aware of a monstrous and barbaric knowledge that put him, a man of the twentieth century, in perfect accord with those Aleuts who believed that the Shadows of the dead still lived in caves along the sea,—lived ready to bring good or evil to those in the flesh who called upon them in times of sorrow and danger. He knew the wild and furious ecstasy of those native hunters who danced naked under the moon to the hollow tautophony of drums and tambourines, and prostrated themselves in pagan abasement before temporary idols made of wood. He was an understanding worshiper in those Eleusinian-like mysteries where women were banished and——

“What the devil’s the matter with me!” he cried aloud to break the uncanny spell; and flashing on his

light he began stamping impatiently up and down the Cave. He shook his head to free himself of the strange thoughts—or were they recollections? The idea startled him for a moment. Then he chuckled. He was in need of sleep, he told himself, either that or—he felt a glow of cheerfulness—he was getting back his capacity for writing fiction.

He walked over to the stone wedge to make another attempt at freedom, and began examining it in the glow of his torch. Suddenly he stiffened, wondering if his imagination were again playing him false. Under his hand the stony wall was slowly moving. He watched it a second to make certain, then snapping off his light leaped across the Cave and scrambled back to the shelf.

As he settled himself behind the fox skins he slipped an arm between two bales and peered down through the opening. Again he caught that peculiar sliding noise that had marked the exit of the men earlier in the day. The darkness vanished as a lantern was set high on a box, and Gary nearly betrayed himself by an exclamation of astonishment.

Below him was a tall figure in a robe of red fox skins. As he looked the arms came up wing-like on each side of the body, the robe slipped to the floor, and the light fell golden on the exquisite rounded limbs of a woman, naked except for moccasins. Her thick, black hair fell to her knees, and reaching to her shoulders, in incongruous hideousness, was a wooden mask, flat-nosed, eyeless, with wooden teeth pegged into a grinning, thin-lipped mouth.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE figure, like some fantastic creature of fable, stood poised a moment, grotesque mask topping a body of naked loveliness. Then slowly, with high-lifted feet, it advanced and fell on its knees below the swinging mummy of the whaler. After a low, barbaric chant of supplication, the woman rose and with outstretched arms, and slender feet never leaving the floor, began a dance that was weirdly magnified in the moving shadows on the opposite wall.

It was a dance of profound silence; of dreamy revolutions, lingering and continuous, in which the rounded arms coiled and uncoiled, spiraled and floated about the stolid wooden face, and the half-veiled hips undulated with the swinging torso. It was suggestive of brown kelp floating on the surface of a summer sea; of the stillness and calm of ocean depths; of strange marine growths spreading languorous leaves and swaying in the passing of great white whales.

Gary held his breath as he watched this dance no other living white man had looked upon—the dance of the lost Mask of Jade. The dance that Seenia had told him was banished and forgotten since the Russians came. Forgotten—yet here was a woman of his own time using it, as of old, to win the favor of a whaler in the ashen land of the dead!

Gary watched the lantern-light gleam along her slender limbs, showing them pearl-white one moment, amber and gold the next. Who was she? All sorts of wild surmises flitted through his mind—snatches from the tales of Rider Haggard; weird memories from stories of the South Seas. Yet not one was as bizarre as the thing that was actually going on below him at the moment. The writer in him, alive now, told him that he could never use such material as this convincingly. It was too improbable, too fantastic for twentieth century belief.

The dancer stood still a moment, her arms extended; then sank once more to her knees in the odd, huddled posture of supplication. When she rose there was an instant when Gary unconsciously risked detection by leaning too far out, for he thought she was going to take off the mask. One slim hand went to the strap behind her head, but it was for the purpose of adjusting, instead of removing it. He remembered, then, that the supplicating maiden, if she would live, must look upon nothing but her own feet through the nostril openings of the mask.

She gathered the red fox robe from the floor and flung it about her, reaching for the lantern on her way to the stone wedge. Gary saw her pull a plug from the floor, and gradually the light was shut off as the wedge slid across the opening with the peculiar noise he had heard before. When he turned on his own light, only the blank stone wall lay before him.

He was not concerned now about it, for he had made up his mind to remain in the Cave until the return of the men, who, according to their morning conversation, were coming back to flense the green fox skins. There

were many things Gary wanted to know about the Island of Oo-koon, before he left it.

He lay on the shelf thinking of all that had happened since Sasha left Rocking Moon for Kodiak. It did not seem possible that only thirty-six hours had elapsed since he had said good-bye to her. Intent on making changes in the plans he had formed, he closed his eyes in the darkness, forgetful of the mummy and his surroundings, forgetful, too, of the fact that he had not been to bed for two nights. He was impatient with himself when time and again he started back from the edge of sleep; yet, despite all his efforts at wakefulness, physical fatigue little by little obscured his mind and he drifted off into a leaden slumber.

He woke to the sound of voices and activity below him, and the nearby soft wheezing of a gasoline lamp. Momentarily bewildered, he lay in the coffin-like space between the baled skins and the wall, blinking up at the lighted rocks above his head. By degrees his senses found their way back into accustomed channels and he remembered where he was. He dared not risk detection by turning on his side to look down on the men, but he identified them by their voices, and soon detected a new one which rang with a note of authority.

"Hey, there, Steve!" it called. "You take those skins off the stretchers over there in the corner, and turn 'em to see how they look. Be sure to put all the RM's in one bunch, and don't get 'em mixed with the others—Boss's orders, and you better look sharp!"

"Aw, t' ell with the Boss's orders!" came the pessimistic voice of Steve. "It's just our luck to get bilked out of the best pelts of the lot—and us takin' all the risk in the business, Con."

Gary realized that the wandering Con had returned from Rezanoff.

"Risk—my foot, Steve!" the new voice replied briskly. "I'd like to know where we'd all be now, if we hadn't fallen in with the Boss. Waitin' trial in the Juneau jail, most likely. I tell you we were trapped good and pretty down there on Prince William's Sound when he came along with his proposition. Mighty little good the pelts would do us, if we couldn't get 'em out of the country."

"Oh, we'd a got 'em out all right," retorted Steve. "Why, say—I——"

"*You?* Huh!" put in Con with easy contempt. "All you can do is crab. You never in a blue moon would have thought of running those skins out by way of Siberia and Japan! None of us would. And even if we had, it wouldn't have done us a speck of good. You've got to know the ropes to put a thing like that over."

There was a scraping and scuffing of feet along the stony floor.

Steve again took up his grievances. "Well, I don't like this way of doin' business, anyway. He's got freak notions, the Boss has. Look at that Naked Island haul of our'n! We could just as well scooped in a dozen more foxes—but no. Just because he knows how many pairs the feller has, he gives his orders, and we must leave the guy with enough to start in again. And that Lone Goose haul—it was the same way there, and with every trick we've pulled since we got in with him. Did ya ever stop to figger how much we're out by all that, Con? No, not you. You guys let him herd you round like a bunch o' malamutes.

Hey, Jim!" he broke off. "Gimme a match, will you?"

"I will not," declined Jim, emphatically cheerful. "No smoking goes in here with all that gasoline stored in the corner, you mutt. An' we'd better speed up if we're going to get these here skins flensed before the Boss gets here."

"Gets here—nothin'! He'll not get here this afternoon. It's blowing up a gale o' wind now, and besides—where there's a petticoat concerned he's got a head like a pot o' mush." Steve was unmistakably radiating disgust.

"For *cri-min-ey* sake, Steve, button up your lip! The Boss had somethin' besides mush in his head when he planted men on all the islands due for a visit from us; and when he planned that floating trap that took pretty near all the risk out o' poaching. By gosh, there wasn't another man on earth would 'a' thought of that trap!"

Above on his shelf, Gary's heart beat faster as he listened to the poaching methods of Con and his gang.

"Say, that trap has all them Federal sleuths guessing from Ketchikan to Seward!" Jim laughed like a boy who has just finished playing a trick on his school-teacher. "They're still scratchin' their heads over how them Southeastern robberies was pulled! Gosh! It sure does me good to think of us layin' off shore in our launch, cozy as cooties in a flannel shirt, while the old floatin' trap does the business ashore! Talk about Captain Kidd! Oh—boy!"

The others joined his laugh. In the general conversation that followed Gary heard enough to enlighten him as to the operation of the floating trap.

It was a small flat-bottomed boat, he learned, built with a flat-roofed house in the middle, much like the feeding-stations used on some fox islands. In the top was a trap-door balanced in the middle. The weight of an animal on one end of it caused it to swing downward, letting the creature fall to the compartment beneath, after which the door went back into place.

This contraption was towed ashore and hidden among the rocks, or in a cut in a lonely part of the island selected for poaching. Fox-food, and oil of anise were placed on the top of the house, and the pirates then rowed back to their waiting launch, after fastening a long line to the trap. They could lie off an island indefinitely, without attracting any more attention than a fishing craft.

With the fall of the tide, the trap was left high and dry on the beach. The hungry and curious foxes, attracted by the smell of the anise and the food, swarmed over the trap-door to get at it, and were dropped down inside. When the tide was right again, the pirates, on their launch, wound up the rope on a windlass and without leaving their anchorage, drew aboard the precious boat load of live plunder.

Remembering the fishermen's boats that had anchored off Rocking Moon at various times, Gary was now sure that over half of Sasha's foxes had been captured in the floating trap—with ~~She~~ money's assistance. He began to fear that she had lost all her stock. Lost it as live stock, he mentally amended, for he intended that the pelts at least should be hers, if he had to do battle with the whole pirate gang and the unknown Boss himself.

"An' not one o' them pussy-footed Gover'ment men

would ever guess we had our fur cached in the Cave of Oo-koon, either!" gloated Jim. "That was another slick trick, pickin' out a place like this where all the natives is afraid to stick their noses. But, gee, Con! What if one o' them officers would get on to it and come here!" Jim's voice held a note of alarm.

"Don't go borrowin' trouble, you guys. Only a few of us knows how to get by that wedge when it's closed. Even if one o' them did get in here, all we have to do is pull the plug and she closes up like a clam shell. He couldn't get out till some one let him out."

"But that woman knows all about the caves, an' don't you forget it," gloomed Steve, as the scraping of the skins went on.

"Well, she don't know these pelts are—well, what you might call spoils of the chase," said Jim.

"Maybe not yet—but how long will it be before she does know? It's this cursed woman business and the Rocking Moon tomfoolery that's got my goat. Why shouldn't we have these RM skins, as well as the others? They ain't a hide in the rest of the outfit that can compare with 'em—look at this—" there came the rustle of a dried pelt as if Steve was shaking it out to show the lustre of the fur.

"Stevie, old dear, thou shalt not covet an RM Blue," came the mocking young voice of Jim. "You got about as much chance of gettin' one as—as you had of getting—the *woman* to kiss you. Ha! ha! ha! How's that? You know what happened to you that day you followed her in here to risk one eye!"

A growling curse rumbled from Steve. "The hell-cat! She laid my cheek open as if she had claws!"

"But that was no nice way to act, Stee-ven, my

de-ah!" Jim went on in mock reproof. "Spyin' on a lady what's going in naked to shimmy out a prayer to the Spirits! Oh, naughty, naughty!"

The general laugh which followed this sally nearly drowned Steve's furious tones. "Aw, you guys make me sick!" he was shouting when he finally made himself heard. "You sit round like a Sunday-school class an' do whatever you're told. You know dam' well none of you was for pullin' this Rocking Moon stunt, an' then the Boss only cheeps, an' you go ahead an' do it like good little boys——"

"Criminey sakes, Steve! Dry up! We had to tackle Rocking Moon when things fell just right. That half-breed Feodor'll be back in a few days, to say nothing of the old dude Father Anton."

"Maybe he'll tuck up his petticoats and go to work now," Con said with a chuckle. "I've got no use for these missionaries. They've put the jinx on tradin' with the natives. I was hopin' he'd gone to kingdom come when the ship went down, but Nash came in with word to Rezanoff this mornin' that he was saved and will be back in a few days."

"That shipwreck happened pretty for us, didn't it? We couldn't have had things fall better. I feel kinda sorry for the girl, though."

"Funny how Nash is crazy stuck after that red-headed girl of the priest," commented Con. "Now, *I'd* rather have this woman on the Island, myself. A jane who'd just as soon give you a clout on the jaw as not. Eh, there, Steve!"

"Not for little Jimmie, though," put in that youth. "I like 'em small an' dainty. I glimpsed that little red-topped pulse-quickener yesterday mornin' when Nash

was taking her to Kodiak to the radio station, an' believe me—she's the class! Side-money told me the cheechako Tynan is gone on her, too. Said it was touch and go between him an' Nash, but that Nash'd graze the doors of the penitentiary to get what he wants; and the cheechako, for all he talks like a high-brow, is dead broke. Wonder how the poor guy is this afternoon."

"Oh, he's loose by now. The *Seal Pup* pulled out from Rezanoff for Rocking Moon about ten o'clock this morning with the whole caboodle aboard—the girl, Colonel Jeff and that Aleut witch, Seenia," informed Con. "I wonder what Nash said to the girl when they found all the foxes gone? He must 'a' been a helluva lot of comfort to her."

"I hope Side-money measured the oil in that lamp on the tomb, so it burned out before any of 'em got back—that's all I hope," worried Steve.

"Trust Side-money, he's wise," assured Jim. "Pretty soft snap he had, though, just putting the *Simmie an' Ann's* engine on the bum, an' floatin' round on the bounding billow." After a pause he said: "Say, I'm dry as a drug-store sponge. If any of you guys want a drink I'll go out and get a pail of water. Guess I'll turn down this oil stove, too, we don't need any more heat in here."

"I'd like a snifter of *macoola*, myself," answered Steve. "But the Boss'd raise Cain if he came back and found we'd tapped his barrel."

There was the echoing of retreating footsteps while the men below discussed the batch of *macoola* fermenting in a barrel near the provisions.

Jim returned with the water and the thirsty Gary

listened longingly to the gulping sounds below as the dipper passed from hand to hand.

"It's blowing up a gale o' wind outside," Jim informed his companions. "I don't think the Boss can get here this afternoon. There's no use takin' chances, you know."

"The devil takes care of his own, Jim. He'll make it all right. He must be on pins and needles to hear how we came out—it means a lot to him, this haul."

As the flensing of the skins went on, the talk drifted to other matters—the price of furs in the London market; the best city in which to spend money and a few idle months; the chances for making a quick fortune in Siberia. To Gary, thirsty and stiff on his rocky shelf, the time seemed interminable. Yet fifty skins had to be scraped and put into shape for drying, and others taken from their stretchers and made into bundles. He began to long for supper time, when he hoped the men would leave for their meal at the barabara. But the grumbling Steve was elected to prepare supper, and the men left two at a time so that always others were working.

The hours crawled by. Now that the stone wedge stood back from the opening of the Cave, the hollow roar of surf came echoing in from the Cove. From the men's conversation it was evident that a storm was brewing and Gary thought uneasily of his kayak, and the long trip he must make in it. A heavy sea would keep him a prisoner on the Island indefinitely.

It was long after supper-time when Con commanded one of the men to go down and see that the launches were moored securely to the float. Jim lighted a lantern

and departed. The scrape of flensing-knives and the sizzle of the gasoline lamp were the only sounds for a while; then Steve, apparently losing the contentment brought on by his supper, began to complain of the weather. Failing to get any response from the other two workers he turned his attention to disparaging the Cave.

"The bloody Injin joint," he grunted. "A fine place for a man to work underground like a mole, with that cursed mummy swinging over us day and night. . . . What does he want to leave it there for? . . . I tell you the thing's bad luck . . . it's a hoodoo. I always said so from the beginning. I got a notion to chuck it tonight. What with that woman comin' in here every day to caper about under it like a heathen, and it grin-nin' down on us all the time as if it knowed somethin' we don't, it's pretty near got my goat."

Gary had a moment's apprehension as he realized that the fellow, should he take a notion to cut down the mummy, would have to climb to the shelf where he lay hidden. He drew a breath of relief when Con answered:

"Everything gets your goat, Steve. Darned if I tie up with you for another season. It's you that'll bring us bad luck with your everlasting crabbing."

"Well, just as soon as I finish this pelt, I'm goin' to have a shot of *macoola*, Boss or no Boss," Steve went on in injured tones. "It's gettin' colder'n blitzen out, and a man needs something to warm his insides."

Gary, little by little, was easing over on his elbow, striving to turn his face so he could look down through the previously-made opening between the bales. He listened for the voice of Jim, hoping that under cover

of the young man's return from the float, he could make a complete shift of position.

He heard it at last, and a loud laugh, which mingled with the sound of a new voice. Then just as Gary completed his change, Jim's hearty announcement filled the Cave:

"What'd I tell you guys?" he roared, entirely forgetting his former prognostication. "Didn't I say the Boss'd get here in spite of the devil and the deep sea? Well, here he is!"

CHAPTER XXIV

AMID the scuffling and the hubbub of the greetings, Gary peered down through the opening between the bales of pelts. The harsh, unshaded glare of the gasoline lamp fell on the group of men below, touching high lights on their unshaved faces and their rough, picturesque garb. Backed by the black opening of the Cave stood Nicholas Nash, leisurely unbuttoning his heavy mackinaw. His cap was pushed far back on his light hair and his face was red as if he had been going against a cold wind. Behind him was Side-money.

The trader's eyes swept over the others as he dragged a canned-milk case from the pile of provisions and sat down upon it facing the men, his back to the great stone wedge.

"Now, men, what in blazes have you done with Tynan—that's what I want to know!" he asked, as he prepared to light a cigarette.

"Tynan?" "The cheechako!" simultaneously chorused the surprised voices of Con and Steve.

"Sure. You told me in Rezanoff this morning, Con, that you left him tied in the barn on Rocking Moon, but when we got there we couldn't find hide nor hair of the fellow."

Con's face was a picture of grotesque surprise. "Well, I'll be damned! We left him tied to the iron kettle in the barn. Why, Boss, he *must* be there!"

Nash's clean-cut brows came together in a frown. "He *isn't* there," he said shortly.

The other men looked into each other's faces uneasily, their work falling unheeded to the floor. Con asserted: "He was in the barn when we left the float, I'll swear to that. I tell you he couldn't get away, Nash."

"And I tell you he did get away," insisted the trader. "You fellows fell down on the job some place. Did he see any of you?"

"See us! No, Boss. I'll say he didn't!" Con ejaculated. "Jim sneaked out from behind the salmon vat and knocked him cuckoo from the back. He never knew what happened to him. Besides, we all had handkerchiefs over our faces."

The trader was silent for a moment, and obviously troubled. "He got away somehow. Still, if he didn't see any of you . . ." the sentence trailed off as he meditated. "But where the devil could he be? He wasn't on Rocking Moon, so far as we could see, and he couldn't get away from there unless you fellows took him. He had no boat, nothing except the bid-arka. But no cheechako would tackle that this time of the year. Besides I saw it on the rack in the barn before I left."

The men began a confused interchange of surmises, which Nash cut short.

"That's not the only mystery either. Some one else has been poaching on Rocking Moon, besides ourselves. I found a set of traps and a couple of skins in

the tomb on Lampadny Point. I also found Tynan's watch there. From some data we ran across in his room it looks as if our clever young friend has either been doing a little pirating on his own hook—or else he's a government spy. . . . He's set down all kinds of information about the Island and fox-raising."

The listening Gary grinned to himself when he remembered the notes he had made on Rocking Moon against the time when he might be writing again.

"I'd give a thousand dollars right now if I knew where that cheechako is, damn him!" finished Nash, bringing his clenched fist down on his knee.

"He's hidin' out on Rocking Moon most likely, 'fraid to come out of his hole since the robbery," volunteered Side-money, uneasily. "But we should worry, Boss. The watch and the traps at the tomb helped cover up our work, didn't they?" he asked anxiously.

The trader did not answer. He dropped his half-smoked cigarette to the floor and put his foot on it. Steve slanted a sour look at the flattened weed, as if remembering that he and the others were barred from smoking in the Cave.

"There's something fishy about this tomb business, men," Nash went on, propping his elbows on his knees and sinking his head in his hands. "We've got to get at the bottom of it. I'll have no one else poaching on our territory."

Side-money had begun to walk up and down the Cave, perpetually turning his head to keep his eyes on his employer. He paused every few minutes to listen to the various suggestions made by the other men, suggestions which the trader discounted impatiently.

"Well, the traps and the watch *did* help us out,

didn't they, Boss?" he asked again, almost plaintively.

"Help us out—nothing!" snapped Nash, shooting him a glance. "They've got me all balled up until I don't know where we stand!"

Side-money hung his head and applying his little finger to his ear, oscillated it violently for a moment.

"Oh, heck!" he burst out finally. "If that's the way of it I might just as well own up. There wasn't no other poaching on Rocking Moon, Boss. It was me. I knew you wasn't going to let us fellows in on these RM pelts, and when I comes across that there swingin' log—well, it looked so handy, I just starts to set out a couple of traps on my own hook, thinking I might make a little side money. . . I only got two," he added, apologetically.

Nash's eyes smoldered, and his jaw set. Then anger and relief struggled for expression in his face. "You son-of-a-gun," he said, with pauses between the words. "You double-crossing, sneaking pin-head! I might have known it!"

"Hurrah! there goes one of the mysteries!" promptly declared the cheerful Jim. A sense of ease made itself felt among the men immediately, and as anger succumbed to relief at the solving of this troublesome problem, Nash leaned back against the stone wedge in an attitude of relaxation.

"Well," he agreed, "that leaves only Tynan to account for. But we'll work that out later," he decided suddenly. "I'm about all in, men, but I've got to leave for Kodiak in a couple of hours to report that Rocking Moon robbery. Nothing like keeping in with the law, you know." He yawned and stretched his arms. "By the way—how's the *macoola* coming on,

Steve. Is she ripe yet? I've been on the water wagon for three solid days, now."

Steve hopped up with alacrity, and as he began untying the old quilt that covered the top of the *macoola* barrel, his face assumed the loving look of a mother bending over her babe.

"She's *just* right, Boss. Clear as gin," he announced cheerfully, putting his head down and sniffing critically at the contents of the barrel.

"Good! Let's have a little drink all round then, Steve. But listen, you fellows—mind you get only one. Until this Rocking Moon job is done, I'm not going to run the risk of having you ball it up. I'm through with the first fellow that gets stewed—remember that." He tilted his head back, stretched his arms again and yawned. "God, this is the only place on the coast that I really feel safe any more. I'm glad you've made the last haul, men. I'm getting fed up on this Jekyll and Hyde business. Three or four weeks now, and we'll be heading along the Aleutians to Petropavlosk, and then down the Kurile Islands toward Kobe. We'll get one hundred and seventy-five dollars for every pelt we have here." He took the tin dipper full of *macoola* from Steve, and held it high. "To a quick passage and a smooth sea!"

The dipper went from hand to hand, shedding its raw odor on the humid air of the Cave. As the men returned to the flensing of the skins, Nash leaned forward, his arms resting on his knees, his hands clasped between them.

"Now we'll get down to business, fellows. How many Rocking Moon skins have we altogether?"

"About a hundred and twenty," answered Con

"And they're the finest of the lot, too. I wish we could turn 'em into the pool, Boss!"

Nash's eyes flashed warningly. "Nothing doing! You keep to your bargain or you don't get that thousand dollars I promised you men for this raid. Those skins are mine. I wouldn't have allowed you to touch that Island anyway. You know that. So you're not losing anything. In fact you're a thousand to the good. You fellows never will get it into your heads that we can't afford to poach on the Aleutian Islands if we want to keep our cache here a secret," he finished impatiently.

"Poach on the Aleutians! Huh! What do you call Rocking Moon?" snorted Con.

"Well, I'm not stealing those skins, men." Nash lifted the dipper from the floor and took another drink.

"Not stealin' 'em?" exclaimed Con, eyeing the tin greedily. "Say, I'd like to know what you call it!"

"I borrowed 'em, see!" asserted Nash, waving the empty dipper with a gravity slightly tinged by the tin's former contents. "Merely borrowed 'em." He dismissed the subject with another wave. "Now see here, boys, listen to me while I tell you how to finish your end of the bargain." He leaned forward while his somnolent eyes traveled from face to face. "I want no blundering about it either: In the first place how many times have you repainted the working launch?"

"Let's see—she's changed her color four times. We kept her white for the Lone Goose and Naked Island raids. She's green now."

"Then paint her red and black tomorrow, and take

the mast out of her. Put plenty of dryer in the paint. Five days from now—I'll give you more detail about this later—you're to load all these Rocking Moon pelts aboard her, and on the night tide run her into Bixby's Cove where the old fish-trap is. Ram her on the reef and put a hole in her. Beach her there inside the trap at full tide, and have plenty of gasoline in the tank. Then beat it for the Oo-koon launch, which you will have waiting for you outside the Cove, and be careful you leave no tell-tale paraphernalia aboard the wrecked launch."

"Wreck her with the Rocking Moon skins aboard —" began Steve in astonishment.

"You heard me!" Nash's eyes rested upon him a moment. "Stow the skins in the cabin where they won't get wet when she settles on the beach. And —"

"Of all the gosh-awful foolstunts—" Steve started again, grumblingly.

"Never mind about that! Now that the season's work is over, the only safe thing to do is make away with that working launch before some gumshoe Government man starts looking it over. Anyway—I'll happen along at Bixby's Cove right on your heels when the tide is out. Perhaps I'll have the Marshal with me from Kodiak—and again—" he hesitated. "Again, I might have a lady with me. Can't tell about that just yet. But at any rate, after I discover the wrecked launch, and find the skins—" he winked slyly at the listening men—"I'll take 'em aboard the *Seal Pup*, and I'll see to it that the gasoline is set to running and drop a lighted match before we leave." Nash stopped to tip the dipper against his mouth

once more, while Steve's avid eyes followed every swallow.

"Ah-ha!" cried Jim, whose sense of romance had been sharpened by his one drink of *macoola*. "Me-thinks I see how the land lays now!" He struck an attitude. "Noble hero restores lovely lady's stolen property, and lovely lady in gratitude falls into hero's arms burbling 'I will!' . . . Well, all's fair in love and war, I suppose, only it's a darned lot of trouble and risky as the devil."

"Trouble?" burst out Steve, his eyes still on the dipper. "What about this other woman on the Island—this hell-cat——"

He stopped. Everyone was looking at the trader and there was a distinct tension in the atmosphere. The glaring light of the gasoline lamp fell full on Nash's face. A muscle at the flange of his nose was twitching and his eyes were narrowed and dangerous.

"Look here, men," he said in an ominously slow voice. "You keep your dirty tongues out of my private affairs. That girl on Rocking Moon is not to be talked over by your kind. Get that?"

The uncomfortable silence which followed was broken only by the scrape of flensing-knives and the wheezing of the lamp. The men, outside of Nash, were bound together by the ties of hazard and their unlawful enterprises. Their lusts and adventures and crimes were open books to each other, but now they recognized in Nicholas Nash some indefinable quality that set him apart from them.

The trader averted his eyes, apparently well satisfied with the effect of his last words, and took another drink from the dipper. With an effort to relieve the

charged atmosphere, he leaned forward with his elbows again on his knees and asked:

"What's the matter with your face, Steve?"

Steve touched a long red scar on his cheek. The subject seemed not a happy one with him. Jim, the loquacious, explained, with a grin:

"Well, you see, it was this way, Boss: Steve sees the woman comin' in here with her wooden mask on—she's been cryin' and cryin' and carryin' on lately something fierce—and he think's he'll—well, he'll be nice to her; comfort her, you understand. But at the first move he makes, she ups and claws him like a wild-cat."

Nash's heavy-lidded eyes rested on the perturbed Steve. The woman of Oo-koon was, apparently, an open subject for discussion; for to the men's obvious relief a slow smile struggled on the trader's lips.

"So that's the way of it," he said, slowly closing one eye and nodding with an air of wisdom born of his potations. "You'll learn, after a while, to keep your hands off anything with my brand on it, Steve. . . . Crying and carrying on is she? . . . Say, Jim—go tell her to come down here. Go tell her *I* say for her to come down," he added as Jim, buttoning his mackinaw, obediently stood up.

"Now then—" Nash turned importantly to the others with an exaggerated flourish of his arm. The effect of the *macoola* was a growing, boastful garrulity. "Now then, fellows, I'll give you a little lesson in woman-taming. By God! my Russian ancestors had the right hunch about them. Know what those old birds said? 'A woman's hair is long and her understanding short!' That's what they said, an' I'll tell

the world they were right. . . . An' another wise crack they made—"The wits of a woman are like the wildness of beasts"—eh, Steve? Get that one? 'the wildness of beasts!' You ought to know!" He burst into a roar that was echoed by the others. Jim disappeared behind the stone wedge.

"We'll let her see us count the skins tonight, boys," Nash went on benevolently, as he indicated the shelf where Gary lay hidden. "It'll cheer her up when we tell her how much money they're worth. Money talks with women!" He nodded wisely.

"You said a mouthful," corroborated Con.

"But not a word about the Rocking Moon skins, and remember—she thinks I'm keeping this place as a cache for the furs I buy at the trading-post. Hop up there, Steve, and begin throwin' down the bales."

Steve rose, stretched his arms, and with a wary eye on the trader, reached, unrebuked, for the dipper. He took a long drink, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand with a satisfied "Ah-a-a!", and passed the tin on to Con. Then, to Gary's alarm, he began to climb up over the provisions toward the shelf where the cheechako lay hidden.

As the man was balancing himself unsteadily on the first tier of boxes, Gary's desperate scheme of attack was rendered unnecessary by the entrance of Jim and the woman. Every eye was turned on her as she came in slowly, a tall figure whose face was concealed by a heavy enveloping shawl held beneath her chin. She seemed neither shrinking nor bold, but stolidly indifferent.

Nash rose from his box with a gallantry that was an admirable blend of the alcoholic and the sardonic.

He swept off his cap and bowed low in the manner of his Russian forebears.

"Welcome, my dear, to our cave-warming!" The men chuckled. "The boys tell me you have been l-lonely without me, and have consoled yourself with his royal nibs up here—" he tilted his head to indicate the swinging mummy, then turned to face the others. "A little cheer, boys. Come, pass the flowing bowl in honor of the lady's visit. One more drink can't hurt men like us on a night like this."

Steve nearly fell off his perch in his haste to get down.

Shedding the smell of raw spirits, the *macoola* made the round again, each man acknowledging the silent woman with clumsy, embarrassed lifts of the dipper. Nash received it empty and reached down into the barrel. A moment later he stood before the woman, his cap forming a close halo about his light hair, his mackinaw hanging open, and his eyes glowing in his flushed face.

There was an expansive recklessness now in his manner as he held out the dripping tin.

"*'Today,'*" he quoted gaily, "*'Today it is our—our pleasure to be drunk; And this, our queen, shall be as drunk as we!'*"

He swayed toward the woman, who made no move to indicate that she had heard him, or was even aware of the presence of any of the others.

"Drink, pretty creature, drink!" Nash's effort to keep up the convivial spirit of the occasion fell flat as he held out the cup again.

The woman was as unresponsive as the stone wedge. "Come, come! Wake up!" he went on impatiently,

aware of his interested audience. "Drink!" He held the edge of the dipper within an inch of the bowed head, then thrust the rim of it viciously against the woman's mouth. But she still remained as motionless as a statue. In the uncomfortable silence the roar of the sea seeped into the cavern to mingle with the sizzling of the gasoline lamp.

Before this stolid, Indian indifference the grinning faces of the men grew sober. They began to shift their feet uneasily and look away in embarrassed efforts to cover their knowledge of the Boss's failure to make good his boast about women.

The smoldering fire in Nash's eyes flared into sudden flame as his mood changed. "Oh, you won't—eh?" His voice was ominous as he shot out his chin and tossed the *macoola* into the barrel, dipper and all. "Clear out of here, men," he snapped. "I'll call you when I want you again."

With clumsy alacrity the others filed out. Only Jim hesitated a moment, looking from the tensed face of Nash to the bowed head of the woman. Then, as if this were none of his affair, he shrugged his shoulders and followed his companions.

The trader covered the short distance between him and the apathetic figure with one stride. "Trying to be stubborn, eh?" he rasped, with set jaw. "Trying to make a fool of me in front of the gang, huh?" In drunken fury he jerked at the shawl.

The obscuring wrap fell away from the woman's face. Gary looked down at her a moment and nearly betrayed his presence by a gasp of astonishment.

It was Zoya.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was Zoya, but not the Zoya of a few months ago. Under the triangle of her heavy, dark hair the creole's face was thin and pallid.

"What the devil's the matter with you, anyhow?" Nash demanded, scowling. "Are you dumb?" Against the wall of the girl's silence the surge of his anger broke with no effect, maddening him with a sense of helplessness. "Can you blame me for getting tired of you—wanting to get rid of you? *I want a woman who's a companion, a pal, a good fellow! One that'll drink with me when I feel like it. One that has a little ginger in her—a little spirit—*" the sentence ended in a hiccough.

Zoya slowly raised her head and her dark eyes rested on the trader's flushed face with the impersonal regard of one who follows her own thoughts.

"An' what are *you*, huh? . . . A Dumb Dora, that's what you are, that's either praying to a Tin Peter, or shimmying a dance beneath a confounded mummy. Fine combination of cheer that is. God!" He jerked one hand from his pocket with an impatient gesture. "It's enough to drive a man crazy!"

"Nicolai," Zoya's voice was startling in its quietness as she placed her fingers on his arm. "Nicolai, take me home."

Without moving from the spot he yanked himself

free of her touch. "Take you *home!*" he echoed scornfully. "Huh! a fine welcome you'd get if you went home . . . Now, have a little sense, Zoya."

"I'm going home——"

"Look here! For God's sake, don't start that again!" Nash cut in brutally. "You know you can't go back to Rocking Moon, now. You wait here a few days longer until I get back from Kodiak, and I'll do what I promised when we got into this mess. I'll be square with you, Zoya, and send you out to the States, and keep you there, by George, like a lady! Like a white woman!"

He ignored the slow, negative shake of the girl's head. "I'll put you aboard the launch with Con and he'll take you to Seward. No one knows you there, and you can get a steamer South. Think of it, Zoya," he tried to speak persuasively, as he took her lifeless hand. "Think of it, going to the States with all the money you want and living down there in some little Southern town where the sun shines all the time, and never having to turn your hand to a bit of work! I'll tell you a lot of white women would consider themselves mighty lucky to have your chances: fine clothes, moving pictures every night, fine smooth pavements to walk on, and a lot of other things you've never even seen yet, Zoya."

The girl neither moved nor spoke.

"And sometimes—maybe once a year," he hesitated as if he feared to commit himself to too much, "I'll come down to see you."

"I'm going home——"

Nash flung her hand from him and took a swift, impatient turn up and down the cavern, stopping himself

abruptly before her again. "I tell you, you *can't* go home." He spoke with forced calmness, his chin set. "Remember, Zoya, you're not like any other half-breed. You've been raised in the house of a priest. You've been raised almost as a companion to a priest's daughter. Think of it, yourself,—do you want to bring disgrace on those people you love? Do you want to make a scandal that'll be talked all up and down the coast of Alaska? Good God!" His anger burst its bounds. "We went over all that when you consented to leave Rocking Moon. I tell you, Zoya, you *can't* go back there in your condition—unless you're married."

The creole raised her head and the two looked at each other.

"I can go back if you will marry me, Nicolai——"

"*Marry* you! Marry a half-breed! You're crazy, Zoya. Men in my position don't marry half-breeds. You ought to know that as well as I do. Get it out of your head."

"But you said——"

"Said *nothing!* . . . Look here, Zoya. *All* the blame for this mess isn't mine. You were as willing as I to take chances, now weren't you?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, I know, Nicolai. But it does not matter, now. I shall burn in hell and pay for it. But first—I am going home," she reiterated dully. "I have prayed to God. I have danced for the spirits of Oo-koon many days. They tell me I am going home. . . . Your United States where it is always sunshine—your fine clothes—for those things I do not care any more. I think only that our baby shall be born in my own country, among my own people. I am going home to Sasha. She——"

"You shall do nothing of the kind, you—you *squaw!*" the trader interrupted furiously. "Rather than have you go to her I'd—I'd see you and your damned brat——"

Zoya leaped like a wounded animal. "You shall not call our baby a brat!" she cried, landing a stinging blow on Nash's face. He started back as she confronted him, dark eyes flashing, lip curled back from her teeth, breast heaving, a creature transformed by the fierce mother love that is characteristic of Aleut women. For a moment they gazed silently into each other's eyes with the cold hatred possible only to those who have once loved. Then Zoya caught up her shawl and flung it about her with a gesture that had in it both dignity and nobility. "I'm going home," she repeated, a ring of determination in her voice. "No place else shall our baby be born."

She turned and moved rapidly through the opening of the Cave.

The trader sprang after her and Gary listened to the diminishing sound of their voices as the two went along the narrow passage toward the outer cavern.

His brain was busy with the facts he had overheard during the long, tedious inaction of the day. The raid on Rocking Moon, the sordid puzzle of poor Zoya's disappearance, his own concealment behind the bales of skins—the whole thing seemed of a piece with some wild tale of adventure. He looked down on the disorder of half-scraped pelts lying under the glare of the gasoline lamp. The men would soon be back to finish their work and he, with no weapon other than the Colonel's Toad-stabber, must rely on his wits to get the best of the six men on Oo-koon. Six against one!

The melodramatic situation made him smile to himself as he was reminded of those adventure stories he once had written—when he himself had had but few adventures. His plot sense had failed him two years ago, but now he found he was going about the work of extricating himself from his plight quite as though he were planning for one of his own heroes.

He listened to make sure that no one was entering the outer cave, then stood up to stretch his stiffened limbs. He noted that the provisions piled on one side of the Cave near the opening, were half-covered with a tarpaulin. The gasoline lamp, with its two glowing mantles, stood on a stack of cased goods. A moment later he was down on the floor examining the plug before the stone wedge, and the groove, smooth and slippery with oil, in which the thing slid to bury its thinner edge in the opposite wall. He could not but admire the ingenuity of those long-dead Aleuts who had devised the arrangement.

After a few hasty exercises to limber his stiff limbs, he settled himself in a depression between some sacks of flour and drew the tarpaulin over him. He was not more than two feet from the unshaded lamp.

Jim and Con came in and each took a long drink of *macoola*. They were smacking their lips when Steve, Side-money and Mack joined them, and the dipper made another round. Gary learned from their conversation that Nash had gone to Zoya's barabara.

"It's goin' to be women that will swamp this outfit yet, you mark my words," prophesied the gloomy Steve. "Now why he's goin' to stage that stunt with the Rocking Moon skins is more'n I can see!"

"You big cheese!" retorted Jim scornfully. "C-can't

you see the Boss wan's get solid with the red-headed girl? Ain't you learned nothin' from the movies?"

"She ain't wantin' to marry him none in the first place," volunteered Side-money, with a drunken nod. "He pulls this robbery stunt thinkin' when she's broke an' in debt an' all she'll have to take him. I don't know whether she did or not—they was hashin' some-*thin'* out in the cabin of the *Pup* this afternoon before we left Rocking Moon. But if he finds them skins for her it's a cinch she'll have him. She's all broke up about her foxes—but between me'n you—" Side-money winked with a show of vast intelligence—"I think she's more bowled over because she thinks the cheechako done it. . . . She was sweet on him, if you ask me. . . . Where do you s'pose that guy went, huh?"

"So long's he keeps shy of Oo-koon, we don't care where he went," declared Con, with a long gurgle. "Pash the—the *macoola*, Jim. One more round and we'll start shortin' skins. Wind's going down a bit and the Boss'll be on his way in an hour or so—if he ever gets through with his woman." Con chuckled. "Gosh a'mighty, but he was sure mad!"

"Letsh cut out the—the hootch, boysh," objected Jim, thickly. He indicated with a tilt of his head the figure of Mack sitting back against the wall, staring intently at his own feet out in front of him. He was beating time with one hand and trying to sing, but failing. "Letsh get this place c-cleaned up and go to bed. I'm sleepy. We've had enough."

"Enough, nothing!" Con hiccupped with a short, sharp yelp, which struck the gloomy Steve as funny, for his lower jaw fell open to loose a cackle of mirth.

"Wha's the matter? Ain't I right?" Con glared at

him suspiciously. "Quit your snortin' and put a fair wind behind that hootch cup."

Through a peep-hole Gary watched and blessed the inebriated inaccuracy with which Steve passed the dipper to Con.

"To . . . Suc-chess!" that individual said thickly.

When the dipper reached Jim, he nodded with an air of bemused omniscience into the portion left for him. "I—I—shay, boysh——"

The sentence ended in an oath and darkness, for Gary at that moment brought his cap swiftly down over the fragile mantles of the gasoline lamp. While the men in cursing confusion, were trying to get to their feet he made for the stone pin that held back the wedge. Fumbling for it in the dark, he was aware of the incoherent and befuddled amazement of the men, who were just beginning to realize that the extinction of the light was due to something besides accident. Feet thumped toward the narrow opening where Gary was desperately trying to find the plug. One hand touched it at last. He marked it by placing a foot against it and rose quickly. He became conscious of *macoola*-tainted breath and put out his left hand, bringing up against a man's body. With this to guide him he delivered a smashing blow with his right, and as the man went reeling back against his cursing companions, Gary pulled the stone pin.

As the blackness was filled with the noise of the sliding wedge, Gary on the outside, slumped against the rocky wall, his knees suddenly weak, but elation welling in his heart. Thanks to the *macoola* he was now even for the incredibly easy knock-out in the barn at Rocking Moon. The five men would stay where

he had imprisoned them until some one let them out—but he had still to deal with Nicholas Nash.

Outside the outer cave he stamped his feet and swung his arms and legs in a very ecstasy of motion. After the humid, liquor-scented atmosphere of the Cavern in which he had lain so many hours, the effect of the crisp, fresh air was like champagne. Overhead the sky was star-studded and in the north the Aurora trembled palely. Small, noisy waves churned a foam-line along the beach in front of him, and the choppy Cove gave evidence of the storm which the men had discussed during the afternoon. Bobbing and bumping at the float were three launches—the *Seal Pup*, the green working launch of the pirates, and the launch of the Oo-koon ranch, which Gary had seen before at Rezanoff. An orange square of light marked the window of Zoya's barabara. Gary's problem was to get away from the island without being seen, and to leave those behind with no means of leaving it, for he intended to be back within nine hours with the marshal who would take charge of the situation on Oo-koon. He could tow two of the launches behind the *Pup* as he went, but could he get aboard the craft unobserved? In order to reach it he was forced to pass in front of Zoya's barabara, from which Nash might come forth at any moment. If only there were some way of locking the trader in the hut!

Gary slipped from boulder to boulder and turned into the snowy path leading up to the barabara. He saw, with satisfaction, that it had a fastening common to the doors of Northern shacks—the door opened outward and on each side, embedded in the jamb, was a steel upright into which a heavy board might be slipped, thus

barring the width of the doorway. The board, standing against the front of the barabara, was not a barrier of much strength, but he hoped it would delay Nash's appearance, should he try to come out within the next fifteen minutes. As Gary advanced he heard the sound of voices within the dwelling. He reached for the barrier just as Nash's tones rose angrily. A second later, above the breaking of the sea, came a scream of terror.

Gary sprang forward with a second scream ringing in his ears, threw open the door, and plunged into the hut. For an instant a flood of cold air obscured the scene with vapor. Then he saw Nash, inflamed with rage and drink, pressing Zoya against the wall with one hand, while the other was fastened about her slim throat in a grip that whitened the knuckles.

With a leap Gary was upon the trader, jerking him from his victim. Nash turned quick as a cat and toe to toe the two men swayed a moment, broke, fell back and bounding to attack again, started raining quick, vicious blows on each other. Zoya, terrified, scrambled to the bunk and stood looking on the battle below her.

Despite their hampering mackinaws the men fought fiercely, exultantly, as men fight who have longed for months to get at one another, and the creole girl watched spellbound while each man held his own against the other for a quarter of an hour. Then the *macoola* brought its inevitable result. Nash's blows began to go wild. Little by little he weakened under the swift pummeling of the cheechako. A grapple, a sudden intertwining of legs, and both went crashing to the floor, kicking, clutching like two dogs in a death

grip. They rolled over and over with snarls and curses breaking through their panting. The trader succeeded in getting the cheechako under him, tried desperately to get at his throat, and failing, managed to insert his thumb inside Gary's cheek. With all his might he strove to rip the cheechako's mouth.

The attempt fired Gary with fury. He flung an arm over the straining figure above him and with a mighty heaving, lunged toward the bunk. Nash's head struck the corner of it. He went suddenly limp, half stunned from the impact, and in a trice Gary was on him tying his wrists together with a handkerchief. He was making the last knot when he became aware that Zoya was coming for him with an upraised stick of wood in her hands.

"Let him go!" she screamed, her face distorted, savage, like that of a she-bear defending her cub. "Let him go or I'll kill you!" The stick began its swift descent and instinctively Gary flung up an arm to protect his head.

"Zoya!" a new voice called, and through the doorway leaped a small, white-clad figure.

Zoya's descending arm was thrust upward, the wood went crashing through the window, and Gary found himself gazing incredulously at the creole girl pinioned in the arms of Sasha Larianoff.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Sasha had waved good-bye to Nicholas Nash as he started for Kodiak, by the way of Oo-koon, she stood for some minutes in the spindrift on the rocking float, watching the *Seal Pup* speed out across the wind-torn bay. The gusts swayed her body and flattened her eyelids, yet a strange inertia held her there. Mentally and physically she was weary, so weary she wondered how she had found strength to resist Nick a little while ago in the cabin of the *Seal Pup* when he had caught her in his arms and pleaded so eloquently that she marry him. Then—freed from the magnetic spell of his presence she began wondering how she had, even for a moment, allowed herself to be swayed by him.

She had not promised to marry him, but Nick had gone off happy in the assurance that she would give him a definite answer when he returned from Kodiak. As if she were thinking of some other girl, the question formed in her mind: was she, after all, going to marry Nicolai? . . . She shook her head, she could make no decision yet, she was too heartsick over her loss, too tired. . . . She glanced once more across the rough bay darkening under the swift approach of night, and turned to allow the wind to blow her along the trail to the ranch-house.

Half an hour later, after a bath and a change of clothes, she came out into the living-room intending to discuss with the Colonel and Feodor, plans for their future. A wild notion had come to her of going to the States to get work, and thus pay off some of her debts. But the very thought of leaving her Rocking Moon home brought such an anguish of homesickness that she stood in the doorway gazing with new appreciation at the homely comfort of the living-room: the cushioned couch before the cheery hearth-fire, the music, the books, the wide easy chairs, the glint of copper and the green of hanging plants.

Unaware of her presence, the Colonel sat musing in his chair. Old Seenia was dreaming in hers. A faint supper-savor from the kitchen told her that Feodor was out there making a stew. The softened strumming of his old guitar sifted through the house. Gay, irresponsible Feodor, who always whiled away with music those minutes when he waited for anything to cook. Tears welled up in Sasha's eyes and tightened her throat. Her home! Her people! Suddenly she knew how dear they were to her. She couldn't give them up now. She couldn't leave all this for the cold, inhospitable States, where people lived in little apartments, one over another, like rabbits in a hutch.

The Colonel looked up and caught sight of her tear-dimmed eyes. "Come here, my dear," he began sympathetically. "Come and sit by me for a while."

At the sound of his voice Seenia raised her white head with the air of one who has been waiting. She stretched high her shaking hand in a gesture that had in it the authoritative dignity of the savage.

"Are we forgetting?" she asked in her quiet, ac-

cented voice. "Are we forgetting we have cause for thanks? Your father—he is saved. God listens. God hears. But no light burns in the *lampada*!" Her brown finger pointed to the corner where the *lampada* hung before the gold-and-silver icon of the Saviour.

Sasha understood. Always in good fortune, or on church feast days, a light was set burning before the sacred picture. For years it had been Seenia's pleasure to attend to it—Seenia, who had a child's delight in all forms and ceremonies. But age had forced her to relinquish this pleasure to Zoya. Sasha reproached herself with having forgotten, for a time, her father's escape from danger. Seenia had not forgotten. She never forgot the man she had nursed in his babyhood.

"Of course, Seenia. I will set the light burning right away," the girl hastened to say. "Ah, Feodor—" the creole had come in, his sleeves rolled up, an apron tied about his waist. "Do draw a chair up before the icon, please. We'll make a light for Dad, tonight."

When Feodor had complied, Sasha, taking a match from the Colonel, crossed over to the chair and prepared to mount it.

"Sasha!" The old Aleut had risen and was coming slowly toward her with upraised, arresting hand. "Tonight—Seenia makes the light." She reached for the match, a faint smile playing about her mouth. "For my little Anton. It is the last time."

"Let her do it, Sasha," encouraged Feodor. "Here—I can help her up with my good arm."

A moment later the old woman, swaying slightly, stood on the chair, Sasha holding her on one side and Feodor on the other. She held the match in her fingers while she looked into the pictured face of the

Saviour and with her other hand made the sign of the cross. Her eye must have noted a shift in the position of the icon, for instead of striking a light she leaned forward and took hold of it, striving to set it straight. A moment of dizziness sent her body swaying toward the picture, one side of which was forced back as the other came forward. Simultaneously came a cry—such a cry of joy and wonder as Sasha had never heard before. The trembling old woman was drawing from behind the icon a square, flat box with sand clinging to its sides. Sasha's heart gave a wild leap!

“Seenia—Seenia——”

The Aleut stood erect clasping the box against her breast, her deep-set eyes glowing with the light of youth. Triumph, exultation were in her voice as she spoke. “God has heard! It is the Mask of Jade!”

Sasha, in her joy, never knew what she did in that instant, but she came to herself carrying Seenia to her chair as if she had been a baby. The old woman shook with a palsy of eagerness as she settled the box on her lap, and, drawing a key from the string about her neck, unlocked it. The others, pressing close, watched her slowly lift the lid. One glance convinced them that Seenia had indeed stumbled on the long lost treasure.

There was no time now to speculate as to how it had come there behind the icon, when it had disappeared long before the family moved to Rocking Moon. Sasha, with hope darting through her, sprang up and ran to the calendar. Her mind was working like lightning. She must have money, and she would have it—if she could reach Seward in time to collect the \$8,000 left there in the bank for the Mask of Jade. Today was the first of December. She had three days left in

which to claim the deposit. Three days! Seventy-two hours! And three hundred miles of wintry sea lay between Rocking Moon and Seward, with no way to get there except on the little *Simmie and Ann* that made barely five miles an hour. And a head wind was blowing—a wind that was a gale now. That meant only four miles an hour—if she dared venture out on the sea tonight. . . . Dare—she *must* dare. Her home, her happiness, and the happiness of her people depended on it. . . . But at four miles an hour the *Simmie and Ann* could never make it. Her heart sank.

She walked listlessly to the window and looked down at the float where her little launch lay rocking in the gloom. If only Nicolai had been delayed another hour, he could have taken her to Seward. The *Seal Pup* could get her there on time. She beat one small fist into her other palm. There must be some way in which she could reach Seward in time——

It flashed upon her. Nick was going first to Oo-koon. He would be there several hours. If only she could overtake him before he started on to Kodiak. Quickly she computed—thirty miles to Oo-koon, a head wind and Nick had been gone over an hour. If he stayed four hours at his fox ranch, perhaps she could make it! She would make it. But there was the Colonel——

She knew the old man would never allow her to venture out on a night like this, he who was worrying now about Nicolai in the staunch *Seal Pup*. She looked up at the sky, alive with cold, bright stars. The wind whined like a siren about the eaves of the house, and the forest sang a wild boreal chant above the roar of the breakers on the outer beach. A clear, cold blow it

was; dangerous weather for small boats along the Aleutians. A drop in the temperature and—she shivered. She remembered it was in such clear, bitter weather last winter that the little steamer *Akutan* had left Kodiak for Seward and become iced over from the flying, freezing spray—iced down in the bow. It foundered with all on board. . . . But she must take a chance. She had only seventy-two hours left and every hour was precious! She must go, for only she could collect the money for the Mask of Jade in the absence of her father.

Desperately she turned from the window and her eyes met those of Feodor—Feodor the fearless, the irresponsible, the reckless. Feodor always ready for any mad adventure. For the first time she thanked heaven that he was that way, and that he would do anything in the world for her. His arm was practically well. He knew the *Simmie and Ann's* engine. He could make it go as long as the little craft floated.

Fifteen minutes later she was standing in the starlit dusk on the rocking float, dressed in her warmest white wool. While the wind whipped her scarf about her she turned back for a farewell look at the lighted windows of the old, wide ranch-house, in which unsuspecting Colonel Jeff sat whittling out a wooden leg for Alexander. Dear Colonel Jeff! She wondered how soon he would miss her and Feodor, and find the note she had left for him under his tobacco jar—a note telling him they had gone to Oo-koon to overtake Nicolai.

She sprang aboard the *Simmie and Ann* now vibrating to the throb of the engine, and putting the brass-bound box in the cabin bunk, stepped to her place at the

wheel, while Feodor cast off. Her conscience gave a twinge as she pictured the Colonel's terrible anxiety when he found she was gone, but the instant the *Simmie and Ann* began to move away from the float, everything else vanished from her mind except the business of handling the launch.

Under the icy stars the gale furrowed the sheltered bay into flying scud. The girl brought the launch up into the teeth of the wind and sent it ahead. It jerked up and down and staggered under the impact of short, hammering waves that flung themselves under the bow. It trembled from stem to stern like a frightened thing forced into danger, and Sasha, in the dark wheel-house, felt her heart beat with a growing fear, as she gripped the spokes of the wheel.

She lowered the brine-splashed window that obscured her view and was met by a rush of wind that stung her face and left it dripping.

"My oilskins, Feodor!" She tried to keep the tremor from her voice as she called above the stridor to the creole, who had just come up from the engine.

He handed her the garments. While she got into the yellow slicker and tied the sou'wester under her chin, he steadied the wheel, his black hair tossing wildly about his eyes. Sasha laid hold of the steering-gear just as the *Simmie and Ann* lunged past the grey-white dunes of Lampadny Point lying low in the blowing foam.

Once out from under the lee of the Point the sound of deep-toned breakers rolled like a cannonade above the chugging of the engine and the *Simmie and Ann* gave a leap that sent Sasha reeling against Feodor.

"*Solnishko . . .*" Steadying himself on wide-

spread feet he put out his hands to hold her. His voice was thin and queer. "We'd better turn back. . . . We never can—*God!*"

Off the beam a gigantic black billow suddenly reared up licking the stars. Instinctively Sasha threw the wheel over and the launch met it quarter on and climbed gallantly to the crest.

"*God!*" she echoed, as it raced beneath them, dropping them down into the seething, foam-streaked hollow. Another mountain of water charged them—then another. Stools crashed and skidded in the wheel-house. Dishes clattered from their racks in the cabin. Screaming of wind, roaring of waters, straining of timbers and lashing of rope ends made pandemonium about the panic-stricken Sasha bracing herself at the wheel. Her conscious mind was blank. But something underneath was directing her hands—something that came from the subconscious that had stored all her former experiences on the sea. This instinct acted for her in the moment of chaos, and she came to herself safely past the third great wave, into water that was noticeably calmer.

Wiping the brine from her smarting eyes she began tensely to guide her craft over the rearing, foam-sheeted billows. The faint glow of the binnacle-light shone on her girlish face, pale under the dripping sou'-wester. Her chin was set, and her eyes narrowed with the expression that characterized the painted face of Anton, the Fighting Priest, in his frame above the fireplace at Rocking Moon.

Feodor picked himself up from the heaving floor of the wheel-house.

"We're going on, Feodor." The words were jerked

out between turns of the creaking wheel. "Got to—broach to if I tried—turn back. Stand by your engine. We'll make it."

The creole looked at her a moment. Then his slim, womanish hand came down on her shoulder encouragingly. "Yes, by God, we *will* make it, Sasha!" he burst out with sudden confidence, and turned to dart below to his engine.

Alone in the dark wheel-house Sasha trembled with fear so great that it had become a sort of desperate courage. The thumping of her heart shook her. She could scarcely keep her feet on the lurching floor, and her limbs were leaden with terror. But she knew that on the skill and quickness of her hand and brain depended her life and Feodor's, and her eyes darted surely between the swinging black and white of the compass and the avalanching seas that raced toward her. Over the bow spray drove in through the open window stinging her eyes and drenching her oilskins. Her hands ached and grew numb on the spokes of the wheel as she sent the pathetically small *Simmie and Ann* to battle against the vast, threatening ocean. Every time the prow rose from the trough of a wave, shedding cataracts of water in its struggle to the top, she felt a surge of gratitude. "God . . . God . . ." She found that she had unconsciously been whispering the word a long time. She knew now why men of the sea felt the need of strong words, powerful words.

Time wore on and she began to feel a lessening of her fear, a sort of uneasy confidence in herself. She kept telling herself that the sea had never harmed a Larianoff. The sea would never harm a Larianoff. Then suddenly the steady pulsing of the engine slack-

ened . . . stopped. While the desperate Sasha futilely spun the wheel, the boat began to swing broadside to a chugging, white-crested roller.

For a terrible instant she saw the helpless *Simmie and Ann* broaching to, capsizing. Then once more the chugging vibrated throughout the little craft and it plunged on.

"Oh, good little *Simmie and Ann!*" Sasha gasped, tears in her voice. "My wonderful, brave little boat!" Her hand patted the wheel as if she were caressing a living thing. But she listened with fearful, straining intensity to every throb of the engine. Could Feodor keep it going?

Feodor proved equal to the emergency and after the space of an hour the steady reassuring beat brought relaxation. As the driver instinctively guides his car safely through the surging tide of city traffic, so Sasha—born to the sea—intuitively handled the *Simmie and Ann* on the roughest water she had ever known. She grew calmer, surer of herself and of her craft. She even began to take a pride in the gallant staunchness of her little boat, and a sort of fearful joy in sending it at an angle to clear the incredible billows crashing in from the sea.

After a long time Feodor came into the wheel-house with a steaming cup of coffee he had somehow managed to make for her on the galley stove. While he relieved her at the wheel, she drank it gratefully, and stamped her numbed feet and beat her arms about her body to get up her circulation again.

They had been battling five hours against the wind and sea when the slopes of Oo-koon loomed dark against the sky each time the launch rose to the crest

of a wave. Familiar though she was with charts of these waters Sasha had never been to the Island, and Feodor had gone there only once with Nick who was making a flying trip to drop off some supplies.

Another hour brought them near enough to feel a lessening of the wind. The water calmed perceptibly, despite the terrifying thunder of sea-assaulted caves and the boom of spouting breakers leaping white in the gloom.

Feodor put the engine at half speed, and opened another window in the wheel-house. He stood with his head out looking up through the spindrift for a remembered mountain contour which would guide them more surely to the entrance of the Cove. The *Simmie and Ann* tossed and rolled. Shore and water rocked crazily about them, and Sasha kept a nervous watch to starboard where huge combers crashed above slightly submerged rocks. Suddenly Feodor, with a cry, leaped back and jammed the wheel over. The launch veered and swept on, missing by a few feet a black, cataract-shedding rock.

"Head her off! Head her off, Sasha!" he shouted above the roar. "We're too close in!"

There came a tense half hour of working the *Simmie and Ann* cautiously out through the reef-sown waters. Then, when the weary Sasha had almost given up hope of finding the entrance to the Cove, Feodor pointed to a low, dim headland misted with the spume of breakers.

"Hurrah! It's there, Sasha! Just round that point!"

Into the chop of the Cove the little launch chugged. The comparative quiet, after the battering of the open sea, made Sasha feel as if the whole world had sud-

denly dropped away beneath her. Her knees and hands fell to shaking violently, and she was powerless to control the chattering of her teeth. She had been at the wheel seven hours.

When she brought the *Simmie and Ann* alongside the float, three launches lay bobbing in the starlight. One was the *Seal Pup*.

All was dark aboard the moored boats, but a light glowed in the window of a snow-covered barabara above the beach line. Sasha slipped off the slicker and sou'wester, and after a word to Feodor, began making her way shoreward as fast as her stiffened limbs would permit.

As she drew near the barabara she was amazed to find that despite the cold weather the door was open. An instant later she was looking on the wild disorder of a room in which two torn, shock-haired, bleeding men struggled on the floor. A woman stood over them with upraised club. A woman . . . was she dreaming . . . ?

"Zoya! Zoya!" her cry of recognition rang out, as she sprang toward the creole girl.

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR a moment the dim light of the wall-lamp fell on the four figures frozen in a tableau of astonishment—one man kneeling on the chest of the other, the two girls clasped in one another's arms. The spell was broken by Feodor, who appeared in the doorway, and after one unbelieving look at his sister, leaped toward her with a glad cry.

At the same moment Gary, aware that he must act quickly before Nash recovered, sprang up and jerked the clothes-line from its place over the stove. When Sasha turned from the embracing brother and sister, he had rolled the feebly struggling trader over on his face and was tying his ankles.

"Nicolai! What does this mean?" she cried in amazement. Then without waiting for an answer her hostile eyes sought Gary. "What are *you* doing here?"

Nettled by the injustice in her tone and manner, he looked up from under his disordered black hair and retorted:

"Ask Nash."

With a final twist to the knot he rose, the angry blood pounding in his veins, and without another glance at her, crossed to the water pail where he turned his back to drink. When he faced the room again the girl was down on her knees trying to undo the knots in the handkerchiefs that bound Nash's wrists.

Gary swung over to her and ignoring her indignant protests, gently but firmly took her fingers away.

"Before you let him loose," he advised, "you'd better hear what he has to say."

The trader twisted himself into a sitting position with his back against the bunk. His face was demonic with mortification and helpless fury.

"Tell me, Nicolai," the girl demanded, "what does he mean? What is he doing here?" She indicated Gary with a scornful tilt of her head.

Nash remained silent, his eyes smoldering, his jaw set in a white line.

"Zoya—" she took a step toward the creole girl. "How is it that you also are here?"

Zoya looked fearfully at Nash but did not speak.

For a tense, surcharged moment Sasha's eyes moved from face to face. "Will no one answer me?" she cried. "Come, Nicolai! Say something! Every minute is precious. I've got to go to Seward tonight, Nick. *Tonight*, do you hear?" She shook him by the shoulder. "We've found—think of it, Nicolai—we've found the Mask of Jade!" Her voice rang on the last words.

The trader glanced up but did not break the black silence that seemed to be eating into his soul.

"Think what it means, Nick! I can pay my debt to you now—if we reach Seward before the time expires. . . . Oh, Nicolai, I've three hundred miles to go—and only the *Seal Pup* is fast enough to get me there on time. . . ."

When the man made no comment, she dropped to her knees beside him, her hands desperately seeking his shoulders. "Oh, . . . Nick, Nick," she implored,

"only you can help me! Won't you speak—won't you speak to me?"

The steel-like look in Gary's eyes faded as he watched the girl. He crossed over to her and held out his hand.

"Get up Sasha," he said gently. "You don't have to sell your Mask of Jade now. All your foxes are here on Oo-koon. That's the reason Nick can't answer you."

An hour later in the barabara Sasha sat curled up on the bunk, her eyes dazed and wondering, her chin sunk thoughtfully in the palm of her hand. She was in full possession of the facts concerning the raid on Rocking Moon and she knew now that the notes and sketches found in Gary's room were merely a writer's aid to realistic fiction. On the other hand, Gary had learned of his own part in the recovery of the Mask of Jade, which he had unknowingly dug up from the hiding place no doubt selected by old Seenia five years ago, before her memory began to fail.

Watching Sasha now from across the room, Gary would have given much to know her thoughts. Had she promised to marry Nash? Had she lost her faith in men, in Nash, or did she love him, after all—the man who at this moment lay bound in the cabin of the *Seal Pup* awaiting the hour when they should leave Oo-koon for Kodiak to turn him over to the marshal? Gary felt a deep sympathy for the girl in this coming ordeal. She had been through so much in the last three days—and she had yet to learn of the part Nash had played in Zoya's sordid tragedy.

So had Feodor, for that matter. Gary had placed the creole on guard in the outer cave, armed with a

rifle from the *Seal Pup*. Zoya had gone to talk with her brother, and the young man realized suddenly, that she had been gone some time. The disturbing thought came—she might be telling Feodor about Nash. If she told him, Gary knew that no power on earth could prevent the trader from becoming a target for the creole's bullet.

He came to his feet uneasily. Aroused from his absorption he was conscious that he had for some minutes been hearing an alien sound mingling with the crash of surf on the beach. With a word to Sasha he crossed to the door and went out. Through the semi-transparency of the night he saw the launches rocking at the float. Some one stood there gazing seaward. The fluttering shawl told him it was Zoya. Was she going aboard the *Seal Pup*, he wondered? Then he started forward with an exclamation of dismay. There were only three launches at the float. The *Seal Pup* was gone!

His startled gaze swept the Cove. Midway a dark moving object rose and fell on the water. A second later Gary was leaping down the path toward the float.

Zoya turned as he drew near her. Under her blowing black hair her face was white and tear-stained and her dark eyes held an anguished look of farewell. Before he could speak she said simply,

"I love him, and I let him go."

Gary stared at her for an incredulous second, then with a smothered oath sprang aboard the *Simmie and Ann* and disappeared below just as Sasha came running down from the barabara.

"Oh, Zoya—he got away?" Sasha's voice was a

queer commingling of surprise and relief. Zoya nodded. Instinctively the two girls drew together and with clasped hands stood looking out at the vanishing launch.

"Siberia . . . freedom . . ." Sasha's half-whispered words conveyed her knowledge of the fugitive's destination, but there was a set look to her mouth and her watching eyes were cold. Nicholas Nash was escaping in the blackest hour that comes before the beginning of dawn. After a long moment she added: "Siberia . . . *exile* . . ." Then slowly her face softened and a hint of sorrow, of forgiveness crept into her eyes that rested for the last time on the lonely little *Seal Pup* beating out past the rocks of Oo-koon to the North Pacific . . . Suddenly her hand came up in the old gesture of farewell she and Nick had used since childhood.

"Good-bye, Nicolai," she said, sadly. "Good-bye"

She was turning to put her arms about the weeping Zoya when a faint cough from the *Simmie and Ann's* engine arrested the action. She started, listened, and as comprehension flashed in her eyes, her swift flying feet were carrying her aboard her launch and down into the engine room, where Gary, in his shirt-sleeves, was bent over the fly-wheel working at it desperately. He gave it a backward pull just as Sasha fell upon him grasping his arms. "Oh, no, no, Gary! Let him go! Let Nicolai go——"

A new and flaming-eyed Gary jerked himself up-right, two grimy hands grasped her white clad shoulders and set her, none too gently, to one side.

"Let him go!" he blazed. "Let that fellow go, the

contemptible, two-faced pirate, after he's robbed every poor beggar of a fox-rancher from here to Ketchikan? God! What kind of a man do you think I am!" Grim determination tightened his lips as he veered again to the engine; but Sasha outraged by the scorn in his tones, and his unwonted treatment of her, lashed out in sudden passion.

"How—how *dare you!* How dare you talk to me so! Get off my launch!"

He whirled to face her. In the dim, smoky engine-room, a-reek with gasoline, the two confronted each other, tensed, furious, stripped for the moment of the glamour of sex. Then, though Gary's eyes softened, he stepped toward her decisively and as if she had been a child, caught her up in his arms and carried her struggling to the deck. A second later he set her gently down on the float beside Zoya.

"I'm right, Sasha. And I'm going after him," he said firmly; and before she could recover herself, he had leaped back aboard the launch.

"Wait, Sasha!" It was Zoya who halted the maddened girl. "He cannot follow, *solnishko*. Nicolai has wrecked the engines in ever-ry boat." And she drew the girl toward the trail that led up to the lighted barabara.

It was some time before Gary found that all three launches had been effectively put out of commission, and by then he had calmed down sufficiently to realize that pursuit of Nash, even if it were possible, would avail little. The trader's launch had twice the power of any boat at the float.

He went up on the deck of the *Simmie and Ann* and looked about him in the growing light. The Cove lay

empty after the disappearance of the *Seal Pup*. The girls had gone up to the barabara and the light was out. With the coming of dawn and the receding tide the wind had died away. A strange peace was falling on the Cove of Oo-koon. In the cool, fresh air his body and his mind rapidly became normal. But his heart was heavy. No need now to ask himself whether or not Sasha loved Nick Nash. Her actions of half an hour ago had convinced him that she did.

He glanced up at the closed door of the barabara, and shook his head. Then once more went below to the engine of the *Simmie and Ann*. He would put it in commission and as soon as the girls had slept an hour or so, they would all start for Kodiak to bring back the marshal.

Contrary to his expectations it took him less than half an hour to find the trouble and put the engine in order again. As he came up into the little cabin, his gaze wandered to the bunk and held on the square, brass-bound box he himself had dug up at the tomb the night before. He sat down on the edge of the bunk and took it between his hands. It was unlocked. He lifted the cover and shoved back the thick pad on top.

There it lay wedged securely in a padded, worn lining of ivory-colored velvet—the eyeless Mask of Jade, the precious relic of the old barbaric days before Alaska knew the foot of a white man!

He looked with interest on the dark-green, creamy textured silicate, shaped to the likeness of a strong, primitive face. It was only life size, but about the edges were openings by which it had been fastened in a wooden frame which had rested on the shoulders of the wearer. Across the broad forehead and on the

cheeks were minute, exquisite carvings like the intricate patterns of tattoo on the face of a Maori chief. As he slowly turned it over and over in his hands, the grotesque beauty of the thing began to fascinate him. Its inner surface was suave, satiny under his lingering palms. He felt, in some occult way, that it was saturated with centuries of history, centuries of primeval romance and mystery.

Under the spell of it his mind went back to the Cave as it must have been over ten decades ago. He saw the blackened vault a-stir to the swinging of a hundred mummies, while the rhythm of breaking surf crept in, and an Aleut beauty, in the Mask of Jade, swayed below in a weird, sea-born dance. He saw the Cave as it was last night, a cache for stolen furs, with a man hidden behind bales of fox skins, peering down on the dimly lighted, rough bearded faces of the pirates below. He saw the hidden man leap to the floor among them, dash to the sliding wedge, and freeing it of its peg, escape to the bleakness of the snowy beach. . . . The writer in him stirred . . . awakened. . . . Half-formed phrases came to him; bits of plots danced before him tenuous, tantalizing; then suddenly he had his story! The title flashed clear on the white pages of his mind: *The Mask of Jade!*

He sprang to his feet, his eyes alight with visions. He knew that at last he had recaptured his lost kingdom, and he never could lose it again. He wanted to shout: "I can write! I can write!" He wanted to tell Sasha about it immediately.

With the air of a conqueror he went out on deck, and unthinkingly started off the float toward the barabara. Then recollection sent him with lagging footsteps back

to the launch. He dropped to a coil of rope on the afterdeck and sat, chin in his hands, looking wistfully at the closed door of the barabara. What good would his writing do him if—if there were always a closed door between him and Sasha? What would it profit him if he gained the world—if Sasha were lost to him?

He began to review his heated actions of an hour ago. He was a brute, an arrogant, peremptory brute who had laid his heavy hands on those slim shoulders that had been bearing so many burdens of late. He remembered now, with a sort of amazed horror of himself, that he had left the marks of his grimy hands on the white wool of her mackinaw when he roughly shoved her aside in the engine room. Why hadn't he been more patient, more gentle with her—this little girl-woman who only last night had brought the *Simmie and Ann* safely through a danger most men would have refused. He stood aghast at himself, when he recalled that flaming, sexless moment when he and the girl had plumbed the depths of—was it hatred—in each other's eyes? Then a second later, with a warming surge of tenderness, he knew that somehow, because of that moment, his love for Sasha Larianoff was deeper, more vital than it had ever been before. And more hopeless, he added to himself, with a dejected glance toward the barabara.

In his dull misery he noted the snowy, barren land back of the hut, slanting upward to the top of Oo-koon. As if in mockery the brilliant winter sunrise was just beginning to tint the lip of the crater with rose. His tired eyes came back to rest on the closed door, and his heart gave a leap. It was closed no longer. Sasha's

little white figure stood framed between the rough portals.

As he sprang to his feet she saw him, and came down the path. He went to meet her. In the morning light her eyes were weary and her face pale, but as they drew together she looked up at him with a hint of her old dauntless smile.

"I couldn't sleep, Gary. I came down to tell you that—that you were right." She held out her hand, and he took it eagerly in both his own. "I . . ." At the soft, rapt expression of his face her words faded in a tremulous, questioning note. She caught her breath, and for an exquisite, wondering moment they stood with clinging hands reading each other's eyes.

Then he drew her little figure into his arms, while back of them, down the snowy slopes of Oo-koon, crept the slow rose light of dawn.

FINIS







